

Collective Impact to Improve Health Systems Strengthening Evaluation

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Background

Health systems play a vital role in ensuring sustainable improvements to health outcomes. Annual investment in health systems strengthening (HSS) is increasing and significant, although precise figures are hard to obtain.

This increased investment in health systems requires better methods for evaluating and understanding its effects, so that HSS investments can be better designed, understood and managed. However, HSS evaluation is a developing and historically underfunded field that faces several challenges.

Health systems are complex and varied, and there is a lack of clarity on the precise meaning of HSS. It is also difficult to attribute outcomes to particular investments.

Recent work to define and evaluate HSS has highlighted both a lack of consensus on what constitutes HSS and a lack of comprehensive evaluation frameworks for HSS interventions. Approaches to evaluating HSS are still in their infancy, which is especially challenging for work that needs to compare findings across countries or approaches. Efforts to better understand HSS evaluation are hampered by these challenges.

The HSS Evaluation Collaborative has been formed to work with HSS evaluation stakeholders to develop a focused, common agenda and a shared understanding of how to tackle their HSS evaluation needs.

Collaborative Principles

The Collaborative works by **bringing stakeholders together**¹ and is designed around the concept of **Collective Impact**.² Supported by Itad, in the role of a backbone support organisation, stakeholders will come together to think differently about how they approach HSS evaluation and work collectively to build and execute a shared agenda to improve this work.

The Collaborative is based on the belief that to move HSS evaluation beyond its current fragmented form, leadership and commitment for advancing and changing ways of working must come at least partially from the joint action of three key groups of stakeholders: (i) **country-level stakeholders** including governments, practitioners, and communities, (ii) **donors** that fund HSS and HSS evaluation, and (iii) **evaluators and academics** who are involved in HSS evaluation.

Initial Areas of Work

The Collaborative has initially identified three discrete but interlinked pieces of work:

1. 'Understanding Audiences for HSS evaluation': A Stakeholder Analysis and Communications Strategy

This workstream will build an understanding of the audiences that exist for the results of HSS evaluation and the nature of evidence that they expect/require. Understanding stakeholder's evidence needs could significantly shape evaluation practice. It will also help the Collaborative to target the outputs of our work for maximum utilisation.

¹ A varied group of stakeholders will be the main driver of the strategic direction of this work and the custodian of its outputs as the Collaborative works to improve HSS evaluation. The Core stakeholders in this Collaborative include The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Global Fund for Aids, TB and Malaria, USAID, the World Bank, The Global Financing Facility and the Global Alliance for Vaccines Initiative. Other key stakeholders are country level HSS actors and the evaluation / academic community.

² Kania J & Kramer M, Essentials of Social Innovation-Collective Impact. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact#

2. 'Shared Understandings for Language, Methods & Outcomes in HSS evaluation' Working Group.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Boundaries and definitions for HSS and typologies for HSS evaluation ;
- Learning from previous evaluations;
- A framework to help conceptualise how health systems become stronger and how this can be measured;
- Developing guidelines on methods that emerge to be relevant and of interest, for instance modelling for health outcomes or better use of routine data.

3. 'Understanding HSS Evaluation from a Country Perspective' Working Group

A need to better understand what will and won't work at country level in terms of HSS evaluation, as well as what country level needs and interests have come out clearly from our early consultations. We believe that a county level perspective will help reconceptualize how to approach HSS evaluations at global level.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Understanding the process by which HSS investors engage with health systems and what implications this has for designing successful HSS evaluation
- What are the interests and needs related to HSS evaluation expressed by country stakeholders and can HSS investors better address these?
- Are there potential innovations in methodology or approach to evaluation at country level that can strengthen HSS evaluation?
- What capacity do countries currently have to implement HSS evaluations? What would be priority investments to enhance this capacity?

The Working Groups will be made up of individuals from the three key stakeholder groups (HSS investors, country actors and evaluators). They will be convened between May 2021 and November 2021, with findings reported by late 2021.

Activities and outputs of the working groups

The Working Groups may engage in a blend of activities, which incorporate *understanding, creating, and/or advocating and disseminating* knowledge and learnings in the HSS field.

Activities may include:

- Develop guidance and/or agreements between partners;
- Summarise existing and useful information/approaches and bring them to the attention of the HSS stakeholders represented in this initiative in a format that is accessible and useful;
- Work together to generate new knowledge and learning that can lead to new approaches and the more effective use of existing approaches;
- Pilot new approaches and learn lessons (if Working Groups extend beyond end 2021)
- 'Socialise' or advocate the uptake of new learning amongst HSS stakeholder organisations and within the HSS evaluation community more widely.

Anticipated outputs of the groups include:

- A shared approach to understanding and evaluating HSS, driven by the work of the Collaborative, will support investments, interventions, and ultimately, people's health and wellbeing
- Improved approaches to organising and doing HSS evaluations
- Guidelines for organising and doing HSS evaluations
- Real world testing/piloting of innovative HSS evaluative approaches

If you wish to know more about the work, please contact Natasha Palmer at: natasha.palmer@itad.com