Areas of focus at the three main levels of the health system

- At community level: creating demand for and ensuring the provision of essential and affordable health and related services of appropriate quality, building on integrated community case management, seeking to influence social norms or barriers that deny the rights of children and women to access care, and related behaviors; supporting initiatives to overcome financial barriers to health service access; improving the accountability of health and community leaders for the key determinants of health and for health outcomes; and strengthening resilience and emergency response capacity.

- At district level: improving health managers’ capacity for evidence-based planning, budgeting, supervision and monitoring of priority interventions for children and women; integration with community-based systems; coordination with other sectors (WASH, child protection, education etc.); and efforts to formalize contingency planning and emergency response capacity.

- At national level: contributing to evidence-based and equitable national strategic plans and policies for children and women’s health, through strengthened use of evidence, equity analysis, costing and fiscal space analysis (in close collaboration with government and partners); leveraging of national and international resources; and linking with UNICEF contributions in other sectors (child protection and welfare, social inclusion and protection, education, C4D, WASH, HIV and nutrition).

Areas of focus on specific issues (as appropriate to the level of the health system and the local context)

- Improving the collection, analysis and use of data and information by strengthening the national health management, information, civil registration and vital statistics systems, and building on global tools and innovative technologies, including during health emergencies.

- Strengthening national and sub-national procurement, supply and distribution systems, engaging with the public and private sectors, civil society and development partners, particularly in emergency prevention, preparedness and response.

- Contributing to the social protection system and plan for financing UHC through the development of investment cases, fiscal space analysis and leveraging of resources (e.g., promoting insurance schemes focusing on the most vulnerable and prioritizing primary health care). Given the focus on a comprehensive and coordinated approach, linkages with social welfare services, early child development and adolescent engagement are also promoted.

- Supporting national and development partners to engage and regulate the private health sector in provision of UHC and in monitoring and surveillance systems, and to ensure that private providers and organizations, and the private sector more generally, contribute to equitable and quality health outcomes for children and women.

- Working with partners to support governments improve the quality of health care, especially community-level and maternal and newborn care, for example through the development and adaptation of standards, protocols and guidelines according to local contexts, capacity building of health and allied personnel, and ensuring institutional accountability.

The UNICEF Health Systems Strengthening Approach

A synopsis

UNICEF engages in health systems strengthening to promote the survival, growth and development of children and women, especially for the most vulnerable.
1 Importance of health systems strengthening

Tremendous progress in maternal and child health has been achieved since the Millennium Development Goals target was set in 2000 but unacceptable inequities remain both among and within countries, with maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity persist amongst vulnerable groups of children and women, including within middle-income countries. In addition, the recent Ebola crisis in West Africa highlighted the fragility of the health sector in the nations affected.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) explicitly call for the social and economic development and political security. In support of the SDGs, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Every Woman Every Child Global Strategy for Child Survival and Development (2014-2015) calls for a focus on the health of every woman and child at risk, emphasizing improved nutrition and child health (“survive”) to also ensuring health and well-being (“thrive”) and expanding enabling environments through actions in the health system and other sectors, as well as how the health sector can function as a platform for child development and participation. Despite these efforts, unacceptable inequities remain both among and within countries as high rates of death, disease and disability, and the achievement of universal access to a core package of services, or universal health coverage (UHC), and ensuring global health security, including in the context of the current health crisis.

2 UNICEF’s involvement in health systems strengthening

UNICEF’s involvement and engagement in health systems strengthening (HSS) has a long history of initiatives with a specific focus on child survival and development, but acknowledges that a fully developed and functional health system needs to be in place to deliver on these goals. UNICEF works towards this goal through a results-based approach that includes situation analysis, followed by the stepwise identification of priorities and resolution of bottlenecks to effective coverage of health services, for the achievement of health outcomes (see Box). UNICEF’s involvement in health systems strengthening (HSS) involves activities at all levels, acknowledging the importance of community engagement and sub-national management capacity to the overall performance of the health system, with a focus on the most disadvantaged. UNICEF has a long history of initiatives with a specific focus on child survival and development, but acknowledges that a fully developed and functional health system needs to be in place to deliver on these goals. UNICEF works towards this goal through a results-based approach that includes situation analysis, followed by the stepwise identification of priorities and resolution of bottlenecks to effective coverage of health services, for the achievement of health outcomes (see Box). UNICEF recognizes that its level of engagement and influence will vary according to the local context. UNICEF also acknowledges the current evolution and complementarity of different partner agencies’ approaches to HSS, including work with WHO and other IHP+ partners, the World Bank and others, and in support of the UN Development Assistance Framework. UNICEF recognizes that its level of engagement across the health sector vis-à-vis that of partners will vary according to the local context.

UNICEF’s involvement in health systems strengthening includes activities across a range of different partner agencies’ approaches to HSS, including work with WHO and other IHP+ partners, the World Bank and others, and in support of the UN Development Assistance Framework. UNICEF recognizes that its level of engagement across the health sector vis-à-vis that of partners will vary according to the local context.

3 UNICEF’s vision for health systems

UNICEF envisions a strong health system as one which includes preventive and promotive services, and curative care, support in 2000. However, in 2013, the first edition of the health strategy, UNICEF, and other children’s rights and health organizations were included. While these strategies, plans and policies have helped to reduce child mortality and improve health outcomes, they were not guided by a comprehensive framework for health systems strengthening. The forthcoming edition of the health strategy, UNICEF, and other children’s rights and health organizations were included. While these strategies, plans and policies have helped to reduce child mortality and improve health outcomes, they were not guided by a comprehensive framework for health systems strengthening. The forthcoming edition of the health strategy is now being developed in close collaboration with WHO and the IHP+ Network. It will provide a comprehensive framework for health systems strengthening.

4 UNICEF’s health systems strengthening approach

UNICEF’s Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) Strategy 2016-2030. The Strategy envisions a world where no child dies from a preventable cause, and all children reach their full potential.

5 UNICEF’s core areas of action in health systems strengthening

UNICEF’s HSS approach1 includes activities appropriate to the three major functional levels of health systems (community, sub-national and national) in different contexts, enabling the promotion of good health, delivery of essential interventions to all children and women, and achievement of equity in health. In addition, it includes the issue-specific areas of existing capacity and potential for improvement. Their relevance and UNICEF’s priority vis-a-vis that of partners will vary according to the local context.

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1. UNICEF’s participatory approach to health systems strengthening is based on the UNICEF’s Health Systems Framework. The framework is available at: http://www.unicef.org/healthsystems/hsf.html.
2. UNICEF’s approach to health systems strengthening is based on the “health systems framework.” The framework is available at: http://www.unicef.org/healthsystems/hsf.html.
3. UNICEF also acknowledges the current evolution and complementarity of different partner agencies’ approaches to HSS, including work with WHO and other IHP+ partners, the World Bank and others, and in support of the UN Development Assistance Framework. UNICEF recognizes that its level of engagement across the health sector vis-à-vis that of partners will vary according to the local context.