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**Drivers of health system strengthening: learning from implementation of maternal and child health programmes in Mozambique, Nepal and Rwanda**

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**Key points:**

- Health systems are complex and there is little consensus on what health systems strengthening entails, what the drivers of successful health systems strengthening initiatives are and how they can be measured. Given the multiple and interrelated factors influencing progress in health, recognising the viable pathways and a range of policy options, is a challenge to policy makers and implementers.
- At the macro level, it is critical to support national-level evidence-based policies and transparent planning and policy-making processes. This will involve enhancing implementation capacity at sub-national level, particularly given the influence of this level on how policies are translated and how programmes are experienced on the ground.
- At the level of service delivery, drawing on community resources, including the widespread use of community health workers, has been a recurring theme in explaining the success of maternal and child health interventions in the study countries.
- This paper suggests a pragmatic approach to conceptualising health system strengthening involving: 1) a focus on understanding the pathways to access and better health taking into account context and history, 2) identifying sets of multiple enabling and obstructive drivers at each level of the health system, and 3) identifying the required actions without losing sight of the 'whole-system' functioning and the contexts that shape implementation.

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