Harnessing SBC for Health System Strengthening: Pakistan’s Chlorhexidine and Immunization Success Story

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Context

In Pakistan, the provision of immunization, maternal, newborn, and child health services (IMNC) faces significant challenges due to poor management systems, limited access to quality care, and underutilization of available services. These challenges are exacerbated by maternal and child mortality rates, which remain higher than the global average. The challenges are multifaceted, affecting both the demand and supply sides of health services. The demand side is characterized by low awareness and uptake of immunization services, while the supply side is hindered by inadequate infrastructure, human resource, and funding gaps.

Evidence

The following findings are based on the review of literature on the impact of SBC interventions on childhood immunization.

Activity Impact

The social and behavior changes resulting from the HSS Component supported improvements in the health sector, including stronger management systems, increased health worker engagement, and improved immunization rates. The project worked to align with existing USAID-funded maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) projects and programs.

1. **Social and Behavior Change (SBC) Approach:**
   - The project adopted a social and behavior change (SBC) approach, recognizing that altering behaviors and practices that perpetuate poor health outcomes is crucial. This approach involved changing social norms and practices through interventions that targeted individuals, households, communities, and organizations.

2. **Individual Level:**
   - The project conducted comprehensive training and one-on-one counseling with caregivers to enhance awareness and change attitudes toward the importance and benefits of CHX. Training covered topics such as proper technique and use, benefits, and behavioral change. It also promoted routine immunization, building trust in the immunization process.

3. **Community Level:**
   - The project worked to increase DPT3 vaccination for children under two years of age in four districts. The percentage of children under two who received all three doses of the DPT vaccine increased from 6% to 43%.

4. **Behavioral Change:**
   - The project demonstrated the importance of basing SBC interventions on sound evidence. Introducing CHX for umbilical cord care was based on evidence showing its effectiveness in reducing neonatal sepsis and improving health outcomes.

Facilitators

There were several key factors that facilitated the project’s activities and achievements:

1. **Effective Partnerships:**
   - The project engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and private sector organizations, to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges faced by the health sector.

2. **Alignment between USAID and the Government of Pakistan:**
   - The project worked in collaboration with the Government of Pakistan to ensure that interventions were aligned with national policies and priorities.

3. **Resource Mobilization:**
   - The project was able to secure funding from multiple sources, including USAID, to support its activities.

Challenges

The main challenges the project faced during the implementation were related to data, capacity, and supply. These challenges were addressed through a combination of strategies, including increasing capacity, improving data collection and analysis, and establishing partnerships.

Lessons Learned

The implementation of the HSS Component provided valuable lessons on how to design effective and sustainable interventions. These lessons have implications for other health systems in setting up similar activities and initiatives. The key lessons learned include:

1. **Aligning with Existing Programs:**
   - The project worked with existing programs to ensure that interventions were complementary and effective.

2. **Strengthening Health Systems:**
   - The project underscored the importance of strengthening health systems and improving health outcomes.

These lessons are applicable to similar efforts in Pakistan and beyond, where similar challenges are faced. The project’s success highlights the importance of aligning interventions with existing programs, ensuring sustainability, and leveraging evidence-based approaches.