Collaborative and customized health systems strengthening initiatives to support the new federal system in Nepal

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Context

In 2015, Nepal transformed into a federal system of government as a result of the federalist reform of government that increased levels of decentralization. Following the transformation, key health challenges such as the level of maternal and child health, especially in the remote and hard-to-reach areas, are being addressed. As health systems are strengthened, the focus of the government is shifting from the provision of basic health services to ensuring the quality of those services. The federal government has taken active roles in managing health policies, planning, budgetary, and financial arrangements. As the new system is being tested, a number of challenges arise in terms of functioning, transparency, and accountability.

Activity Description

In 2016, in collaboration with the municipalities in the Karnali and Lumbini region, SSBH supported the strengthening of health systems in municipalities. The goal was to improve the capacity of the local governments to provide quality health services to the population. The primary objectives of the activities focused on improving the health information systems, strengthening human resources, and simplifying administrative processes.

Activity Impact

As a result of the SSBH support, a milestone achievement was the development of the SSBH Health Monitoring and Assessment Tool (HMAT). The tool was used to monitor the progress of the health systems strengthening initiatives and to ensure that the interventions were on track. The HMAT was designed to be used by the municipalities and was found to be an effective tool for monitoring the health systems strengthening initiatives.

Facilitators

In developing the HMAT, SSBH identified the key stakeholders in the health systems strengthening process and engaged them in the development of the tool. This helped in ensuring that the tool was user-friendly and effective. The SSBH team also provided technical support to the municipalities to ensure that they were able to use the HMAT effectively.

Challenges

Many respondents cited the technical assistance in developing health policies, acts and guidelines as the most significant contribution from SSBH. When the newly elected municipal governments started their work, they realized that they lacked the necessary expertise to develop and implement policies and guidelines. This realization was a major challenge for the municipalities, as they were responsible for ensuring the quality of health services in their respective areas.

Lessons Learned

The SSSB activity was a major learning experience for all involved. The process of working with the municipalities provided a valuable opportunity to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the federal system. The lessons learned can be applied to future health systems strengthening initiatives and can help in developing better policies and guidelines for the municipalities.