

Strengthening Mixed Health Systems: building the case and pathways for quality private maternal care

Project Challenge

Many countries recognize the potential for the local private health sector to help them achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and wish to better steward the private health sector to do so. However, many governments lack information about local private providers and solutions in their countries, do not have a defined stewardship role, and/or are not supported by the appropriate institutional systems and processes to engage them in a mixed (public-private) health system. Similarly, the local private health sector in many countries wants to engage with the public sector, but they need government direction and guidance on what the strategic opportunities are and how they can engage with them. This, coupled with the local private health sector's limited resources (human, financial, material) to build sustainable business ventures and opportunities to engage with public sector stewards and public-sector financing, results in fragmented, un-regulated, and isolated private healthcare practices.

Project Approach

With support from [Merck for Mothers](#), the Strengthening Mixed Health Systems (SHMS) project, led by [Results for Development \(R4D\)](#) will support two lower- or middle-income country (LMIC) governments and local private sector providers or solutions to demonstrate and document practical and actionable processes for integrating quality private maternity care in government stewarded health systems. Public-private health sector engagements around maternal care could include: government purchasing quality maternal care services from private providers; government leveraging private sector technologies to identify and enroll mothers in national health insurance plans; or government working with local private sector associations to make training and accreditation available to private sector maternal care providers, among others. Ultimately, the processes for improving public-private sector engagement will help country actors move towards achieving the SDGs and UHC and will act as models for other countries with the same goals.

Project goals include:

- **Primary:** Generate implementation insights and evidence on how to successfully integrate quality private maternal care into mixed health systems through engagements in two LMICs at critical stages of the public-private engagement process. Ultimately successful integration of quality private maternal care helps these countries move towards achieving SDG targets and UHC.
- **Secondary:** The implementation insights and evidence generated are shared globally, helping other countries with the same goals for leveraging public-private sector engagements to improve maternal health, and building buy-in for a longer-term initiative to support further country interest and assistance.

Figure A. SMHS conceptual framework

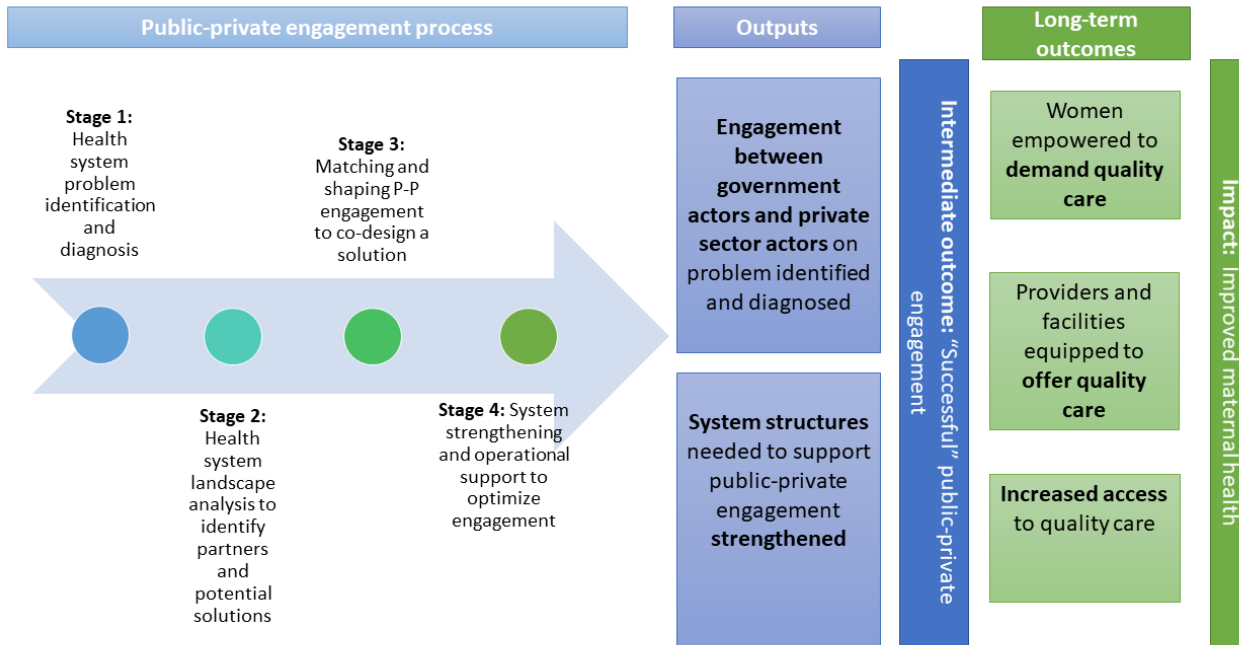


Figure A describes the project’s framework for achieving successful public-private sector engagement with the aim of ultimately contributing to improved maternal health outcomes. Based on R4D’s extensive work in the field of public-private health sector engagement we have outlined a four-stage process for successful engagement. This process includes:

- 1. Health problem identification and diagnosis.** A first step in ensuring successful public-private health sector engagement is supporting countries to identify their health system challenge and diagnose the problem using evidence-based and participatory analyses. This includes convening a group of country actors to collaboratively identify and reach consensus on their greatest maternal health challenge (e.g. low uptake of ante-natal care (ANC)) and the root causes associated with that problem (e.g. lack of knowledge of the importance of ANC caused by inactive community outreach committees; low demand for ANC because facilities are not well equipped caused by inadequate funding to update facilities; low uptake caused by mother’s inability to access transportation to a facility).
- 2. Targeted health system landscape analysis to identify potential partners and solutions.** Directed by the maternal health problem root causes, countries must be supported to identify the key health system actors and potential solutions to address these problems. Through the process of conducting a market landscaping and analysis they may also identify gaps and needs for additional solutions. Local private actors and solutions might include: a mobile technology that can reach mothers with information about the importance of ANC, or private providers that offer high-quality maternal care.
- 3. Matching and shaping public-private sector engagements to co-design a solution.** Through experience we have learned that it is often important for the public and private health sectors to work together to co-design a solution. While it is possible that a solution to a country’s maternal

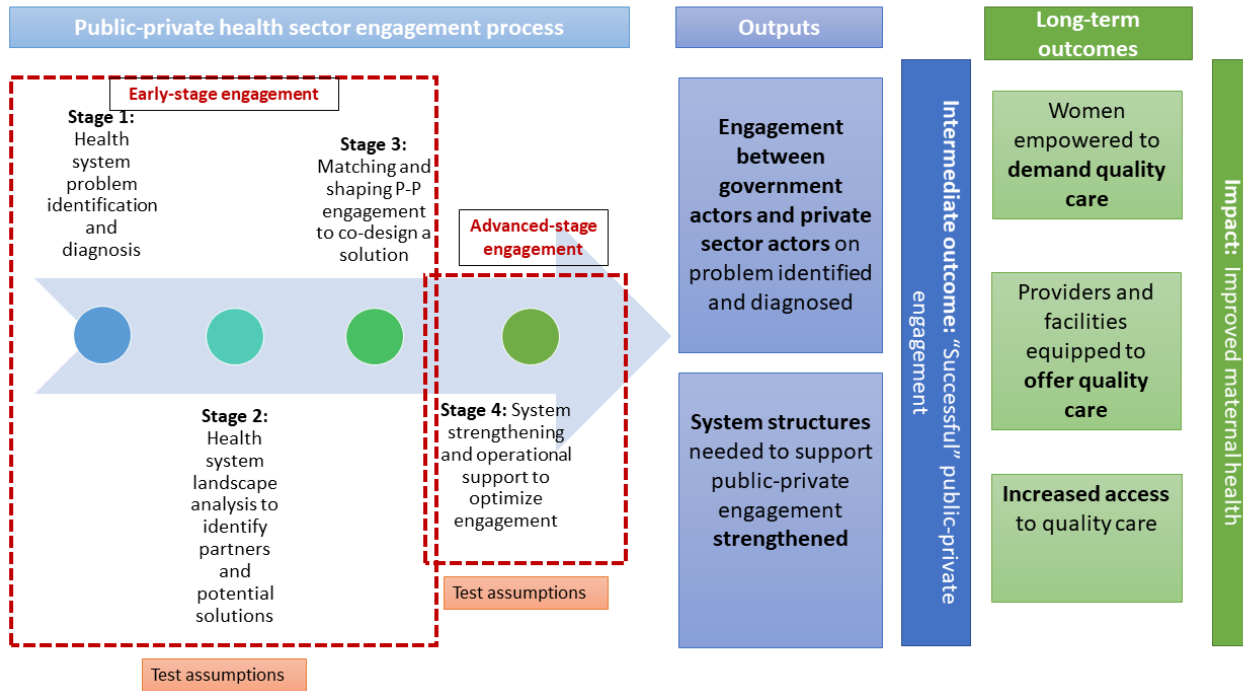
health problem already exists in the market, it is likely that it will need to be shaped to that country's specific problem context to ensure scalability and sustainability. If a solution does not already exist, this may also be an opportunity for the public and private sector to define the parameters of a new solution together. During this stage of engagement, country actors may need support in thinking about ways that existing private sector solutions can be tailored or developed to address a country's specific maternal health challenge.

4. System strengthening and operational support to optimize public-private sector engagements.

Once the public and the private health sectors have come together to tackle a health challenge, there may still be additional barriers to ensuring the engagement is successful. These challenges might include political, legal and regulatory, organizational, and economic barriers. In this stage of the public-private sector engagement process, country actors will need support on a variety of activities some of which may include: bottle-neck analyses to determine why the public-private sector engagement has not yet been successful; support to government in developing partnership proposals, memorandums of understanding, requests for proposals, and contracting and payment mechanisms; and support to the private sector through organization needs assessments, business plan optimization, and health financing options analyses.

The SMHS project will support two countries at different stages of the four-stage process – an “advanced-stage” country and an “early-stage” country (described in Figure B). The advanced-stage country will have an existing public-private health sector engagement in progress focused on improving maternal health but will be facing some barriers to ensuring optimization and sustainability of the engagement. The project will support the advanced-stage country through Stage 4 of the process based on the country context and engagement needs. The SMHS project will also support a country in the early stages of identifying a maternal health challenge and considering potential private sector solutions. The project will support the early-stage country through Stages 1-3 (and potentially 4) of the process to co-design a viable solution to the problem leading to an effective and sustainable public-private health sector engagement in that country.

Figure B. Advanced-stage and early-stage engagement entry points



SMHS project country selection will be driven by country demand, meaning country partners must show need, buy-in, and commitment to working with the SMHS project to be selected. Together with *Merck for Mothers*, R4D will develop and employ selection criteria to rank countries based on: (1) a country’s maternal health profile, (2) the existence of a private sector market for and/or existence of public-private sector engagements aimed at improving maternal healthcare in a country, and (3) a country’s enabling health system environment and readiness for public-private sector engagement. Based on these rankings and subsequent key-informant interviews with countries, the project team will engage with a handful of selected countries and conduct scoping visits before making a final selection. The key informant interviews and country scoping visits will allow the team to better assess the feasibility of a successful engagement including country partners’ commitment and capacity to engage. Once two countries are selected R4D will provide process facilitation and technical assistance to support country partners through the public-private sector engagement process described in this note.

This is a learning project, and the project will ultimately test and generate evidence of the effectiveness of this approach in fostering successful public-private health sector engagements across two different country contexts and stages of engagement. Additionally, to complement the more extensive country-based work, the project will conduct an evidence review and supplementary secondary case studies of successful and unsuccessful public-private health sector engagements to add to the evidence generated in the two country contexts. Finally, where possible, the project aims to surface evidence of the correlation between successful public-private health sector engagement and improved maternal health outcomes.

The project will be rolled-out in three phases:

- **Phase 1** (Jan-Sept 2019): Country selection, evidence review and initial country engagement
- **Phase 2** (Oct 2019 - Sept 2020): Technical assistance and facilitation of country engagements
- **Phase 3** (Oct - Dec 2020): Knowledge synthesis and development of a report for country and global dissemination

The project aims to produce and disseminate several products including but not limited to:

- Brief on the current landscape of public-private health sector engagement for maternal health
- Measures and indicators of effectiveness of public-private health sector engagements
- Analytical tools and processes for supporting the public-private health sector engagement process
- Report synthesizing implementation insights, evidence, and guidance from the support to the “advanced-stage” and “early-stage” countries and supplementary case study learnings

If you or a colleague are interested in being considered for process facilitation and technical assistance support from this project and believe you may satisfy the selection criteria described here, please contact: Mr. Keith Mangam, Senior Program Officer at Results for Development kmangam@r4d.org

For all other information about the project please contact:

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