



HEALTH

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BUILDING RESILIENT HEALTH SYSTEMS AND PROMOTING HEALTH



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CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic put unprecedented strain on health systems, directly and indirectly affecting morbidity and mortality across the globe. It revealed structural fragilities within health systems and the urgent need to make them more resilient to future threats such as new pandemics, antimicrobial resistance, conflicts, and natural disasters due to climate change.

By definition, a resilient health system has the capacity to effectively prevent, prepare for, and respond to such shocks in a way that allows it to sustain required operations and resume optimal performance as quickly as possible. To this end, governments need well-functioning, adequately resourced and efficiently managed health systems with comprehensive health services packages. Well-motivated and competent health professionals are as decisive in such a system as functioning information systems, and solid financing mechanisms. Strong and effective leadership to mobilise and coordinate all available resources is a key success factor.

GFA CONCEPT AND SERVICES

For more than 25 years, GFA's Health department has assisted governments in undertaking complex health sector reform processes to improve systems performance, mainly in low and middle income countries. As a result, the company has contributed to moving towards universal health coverage and improving health-related Sustainable Development Goal 3.

GFA offers a wide range of services to assess the resilience of and build resilient health systems. These include strengthening financing mechanisms and health insurance schemes, building infrastructure, procuring medicines as well as equipment, and developing evidence-based policies as well as organizational and legal setups. GFA also supports capacity development of health professionals through classroom, online and blended trainings, long-term mentorship and national as well as decentralized workshops. GFA promotes inter-sectoral coordination and local community engagement in relation with health promotion and social and behavior change interventions. GFA's system strengthening efforts adopt a gender-transformative approach to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in healthcare and leadership positions within government.



INFECTIOUS DISEASES AND PANDEMIC PREVENTION AND RESPONSE



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CHALLENGES

Infectious diseases are a major cause of death worldwide, particularly in low and middle-income countries. Some examples of infectious diseases include HIV, tuberculosis, influenza, measles and neglected tropical diseases. They spread among humans and lead to epidemics with major impacts on society, often disproportionately affecting women, girls, and vulnerable groups. More recently, the exposure to pandemics has been fostered by increased human mobility, proving how interconnected and interdependent countries are in the context of globalization. To minimize transmission, countries around the world have established national surveillance systems, using epidemiological data and a range of other information sources from different sectors and disciplines. This is meant to detect, confirm and report epidemics as early as possible, and to ensure timely and appropriate public health action.

However, the control and eradication of infectious diseases face many challenges, including emerging and re-emerging diseases due to climate change and the destruction of biodiversity. The potential introduction of infectious agents by bioterrorists, and an increasing resistance of pathogens to current antimicrobial drugs constitute additional challenges.

GFA CONCEPT AND SERVICES

To address these challenges and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 3, GFA promotes an integrated and coordinated approach to infectious disease prevention and control as well as pandemic prevention and response.

Related services comprise the development of comprehensive epidemiological surveillance systems through technical assistance. Over the past decade, expert teams have improved data and information management, laboratory infrastructure, sample transport management, policy and standards development, human and finance resources management, medical emergency systems, and research in several countries. GFA's multi-sectoral setup allows leveraging knowledge from key sectors such as agriculture, water and sanitation, and natural resources management and environment. Thereby better address all kinds of infectious diseases and threats such as virus- and water-borne diseases, zoonotic diseases, and antimicrobial resistance in line with the One Health approach based on the understanding that there are close links between the health of humans, animals and the environment.

GFA's expertise in digital solutions opens additional opportunities to use new technologies, epidemic intelligence applications, digital pandemic preparedness and e-learning to help countries deal with epidemics more efficiently.



NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES AND MENTAL HEALTH



CHALLENGES

During the past two decades, global deaths due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have rapidly increased. NCDs, including heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease, are responsible for 74% of all deaths worldwide. They are mainly due to tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy diets. A large number of people living with NCDs are also likely to develop some form of disability as the disease progresses.

Mental health is another growing global health issue. Related needs are high but national responses are insufficient and inadequate as countries worldwide dedicate less than 2% of their health care budget to mental health. Mental health problems can occur in many different shapes and severities. What starts as acute stress, insomnia or fear can develop into a burn-out, clinical depression, or anxiety disorder if adequate support is not provided. Many effective forms of support or therapy exist, and only a few of them need to be administered in closed psychiatric hospitals. Yet, the vast majority of government funding goes into such clinics. Health and social care systems need to invest more in community-based psychological and social support to help affected people close to their homes.

GFA CONCEPTS AND SERVICES

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 3, GFA contributes to reducing premature mortality from NCDs through prevention and treatment and to promoting mental health, quality of life, and well-being. Given gender-specific

disease burdens and exposure to risk factors, this approach is tailored to the specific needs of men and women.

In order to reduce the NCD burdens, teams of experts support leadership and governance for ministries and organizations at national and decentralized levels. They enable medical and nursing institutions to provide trainings on the prevention, treatment and management of NCDs, introduce new and updated protocols, and strengthen referral systems. They also develop tools for patient education and counselling and work with communities to raise awareness on risk factors and encourage healthy lifestyles at schools and work places, and through mass as well as social media. Digital health constitutes another important part of the GFA approach to NCD programs. This comprises applications for digital learning, referral and online appointment systems, patient education, and the adherence to protocols by health professionals.

GFA service provision to improve mental health include community-based interventions that prevent mental health disorders at a young age, and promote better access to related services. Experienced consultants enhance capacities by training health providers in evidence-based treatment approaches to provide psycho-social support for people affected by war. They also empower families to support members with mental health needs, improve access to treatment, and address psychological needs of schoolchildren and adolescents.



MATERNAL, NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS



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CHALLENGES

According to WHO, every two minutes a woman dies during pregnancy or childbirth. Yet, most of these deaths could be prevented through access to high quality and respectful maternal health care and through addressing gender and other inequalities affecting sexual and reproductive health and rights. As many women around the world are still faced with unintended pregnancies, it is vital to provide and promote age-appropriate health education as well as access to modern contraceptives, especially for adolescent girls.

At the same time, child mortality rates remain to be a concern, as approximately five million children under-5 die worldwide every year. Access to basic lifesaving interventions, breastfeeding and adequate nutrition, vaccinations, and treatment for common illnesses could avoid this. Evidence also shows that family planning programs promoting an interval of two years or more between births can significantly decrease infant mortality rates.

GFA CONCEPT AND SERVICES

GFA contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 3 by implementing projects that reduce maternal mortality, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under-5, and ensure universal access to SRHR services.

To that end, the company adopts a health systems strengthening approach through service delivery that supports structures and processes for quality improvement and the development of clinical protocols and standards. A

network of experts fosters and upgrades the capacity of health professionals through training, coaching and mentoring, using face-to-face, digital and blended methods and tools.

GFA helps ministries set up functioning, rehabilitated, resilient, and equipped health facilities, and implement performance-based funding mechanisms. The company's inhouse procurement expertise ensures continuous supplies of medicines and commodities where needed, including the use of social marketing. Leadership and governance through management mentoring, evidence-based planning, and monitoring and evaluation constitute complementing efforts.

Finally, GFA's long-standing experience in implementing community engagement and social and behavior change programs applying a gender transformative approach ensures that families adopt healthy habits at the household level. As a result, families use health services and space their pregnancies, and communities reduce the stigma and social marginalization regarding people living with HIV.

Young people are educated and health services oriented towards their need for age-appropriate information and services to protect them from unwanted pregnancies and ensure they remain healthy.



DIGITAL HEALTH



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CHALLENGES

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines digital health as “the field of knowledge and practice associated with the development and use of digital technologies to improve health”. These days, a range of digital interventions and systems are available to address health challenges such as low service utilization, issues with the supply of medicines and commodities, health providers’ poor adherence to guidelines, and the lack of quality and reliable data.

Depending on the issue identified, there is a multitude of potential digital interventions for every building block of the healthcare system that can be leveraged to improve the health situation in a country – from very simple to very sophisticated in terms of the technology involved. Examples include treatment reminders to patients via SMS, telemedicine for remote consultations, or devices to support the diagnosis and decision-making of healthcare practitioners. Also, technology for cold-chain supervision, digital reporting of indicators for informed decision making, digital disease surveillance, and many other use cases are available.

Although challenges such as ensuring data security, privacy and reliability, digital infrastructure gaps, or the lack of clear data interoperability standards still pose severe obstacles, digital health solutions have the potential of truly transforming health systems around the world.

* <https://digitalprinciples.org>

GFA CONCEPT AND SERVICES

GFA’s concept for implementing digital health solutions is in line with the globally agreed Principles for Digital Development* which define the necessary steps for safeguarding the sustainability of digital solutions. Experts provide technical assistance to governments and organizations across the range of health system challenges, from assessments and evaluations to large-scale interventions such as digitizing the national management of blood services in Ukraine. Digital solutions also allow GFA to expand outreach to the population, particularly to those living in remote communities and to other priority and hard-to-reach groups. This enhances the latter’s engagement in health programs and their access to health education and health services.

If suitable to enhance the efficiency of health systems and the quality of health services, GFA consultant teams proactively integrate digital health tools into the respective technical assistance portfolio.



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ONE HEALTH



CHALLENGES

Rapid global, social and environmental changes impact the health and well-being of people and animals, and their shared environment. One Health is an approach to strengthen multidisciplinary collaboration in the detection, prevention, and management of health risks, disease outbreaks, natural disasters, and related phenomena. The core principle is the recognition that ecosystem linkages and interdependencies require an integrated, multi-sectoral, and unifying approach that aims at balancing and optimising human, animal, and environmental health in a sustainable manner. This approach acknowledges the complementary and enhanced connectivity among existing international agreements to advance pandemic prevention and preparedness. Addressing the complex health issues at the human-animal-ecosystem interface requires multidisciplinary expertise and a wide range of stakeholders to manage and overcome related challenges effectively.

GFA CONCEPT AND SERVICES

GFA has a strong record of accomplishments with providing consulting services on infections disease control, rural development including livestock, management of national parks conserving wild life and biodiversity and addressing the adversities of climate change. GFA is has been working in the sectors relevant to One Health and can easily garner the multi-sectoral expertise and response that is required to assist governments and regional governance bodies protect and monitor the ecosystem. To GFA, One Health is not just a theoretical concept – it is a call to action.

The complementary and connectivity of the One Health approach are reflected in the company's efforts towards achieving various Sustainable Development Goals(SDG). In particular, this concerns Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), but GFA also supports sustainable land management and agriculture (SDG 2 – Zero Hunger), environmental protection (SDG 15 – Life on Land, SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 14 – Life Below Water), as well as sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12).

Drawing from the expertise of its different technical departments and its One Health Working Group, GFA is in a prime position to provide the required multidisciplinary expertise to facilitate a transformative shift from segmented systems to interdisciplinary alliance and cohesive integration across all sectors and levels. To this end, GFA fosters knowledge sharing through digital solutions, smart databases, and surveillance across different sectors.



FOOD & NUTRITION POLICIES



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CHALLENGES

One in three people worldwide is malnourished, about 795 million are undernourished, 1.9 billion are overweight and 2 billion are considered micro-nutrient deficient. The cost of the malnutrition burden is estimated amount to 4-5 % of the global gross domestic product, while preventing malnutrition is estimated to have ca. 16 Euro return for every Euro invested. This is considered one of the top ten most effective investments in development. Although 80 % of food is produced by smallholder farmers, their family members account for 50 % of the undernourished.

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals stipulated to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture until 2030. The United Nations named 2016 to 2025 the Decade of Action on Nutrition, aiming at improving maternal, infant and young child nutrition and tackling obesity and related diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and others.

GFA APPROACH

Better nutrition is an important enabler and outcome of poverty reduction and development. GFA's approach is multi-sectoral, linking nutrition to health, agriculture, natural resources management, water, education, in-come generation and good governance. Our Food & Nutrition experts at GFA collect specific information and know-how and make it available to these business areas.

GFA SERVICES

GFA offers a wide range of services that aim at putting global nutrition goals on the national agenda and into sub-national development planning. Our health experts are linking maternal, infant and young child nutrition to ante and post natal care, while promoting breastfeeding, growth monitoring, complementary feeding as well as sanitation and hygiene. We train local trainers on nutrition communication and support e-learning and ICT solutions for a younger generation.

GFA also supports nutrition-sensitive agriculture, value chains and market linkages to generate household income and strengthen the decision making of women and men in healthy food and living conditions. We track public budgeting in nutrition, and the targeting of social protection programs for nutrition enhancement. On a global level we are analyzing rural-urban linkages and policies in favor of sustainable food systems for growing urban populations. This all contributes to fighting the underlying causes of malnutrition and hunger, and to increasing the quality, diversity, and affordability of food for healthy livelihoods.

