

The Public-Private Engagement Ecosystem

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Overview

Over the past two decades, public-private engagement¹ (PPE) has gained acceptance as an important element in achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and population health outcomes – including maternal health. However, there is less clarity and agreement about *how* to achieve effective PPE and *how* to leverage it to strengthen health systems. To clarify the *how*, the SMHS project looked at how existing systems and engagement factors either help or hinder PPEs - both in terms of effectiveness and sustainability. A first step in understanding and successfully achieving the *how*, is taking a holistic system-focused view of PPE and better understanding the factors and interactions in this complex ecosystem. Understanding this ecosystem can help stakeholders prepare for and optimize their engagements, thus improving the effectiveness and sustainability of PPEs.

The Strengthening Mixed Health Systems (SMHS) project supported by Merck for Mothers (MfM), developed a PPE Ecosystem Framework to assist health system stakeholders in taking a whole of health system view of PPE (**Figure 1**). The PPE Ecosystem was informed by an evidence review that identified 237 studies published in the academic literature related to strengthening mixed health systems and maternal health. Ultimately, the review included a deep analysis of 76 of the papers.

Together, experience and evidence alike suggest that while the technical, or “hard”, elements of PPE and system integration, such as regulatory and financing landscapes and structural platforms for engagement, are important and often challenging — equally challenging and impactful are the “soft” factors, including relationships, dialogue, understanding and collaboration between the PPE actors.

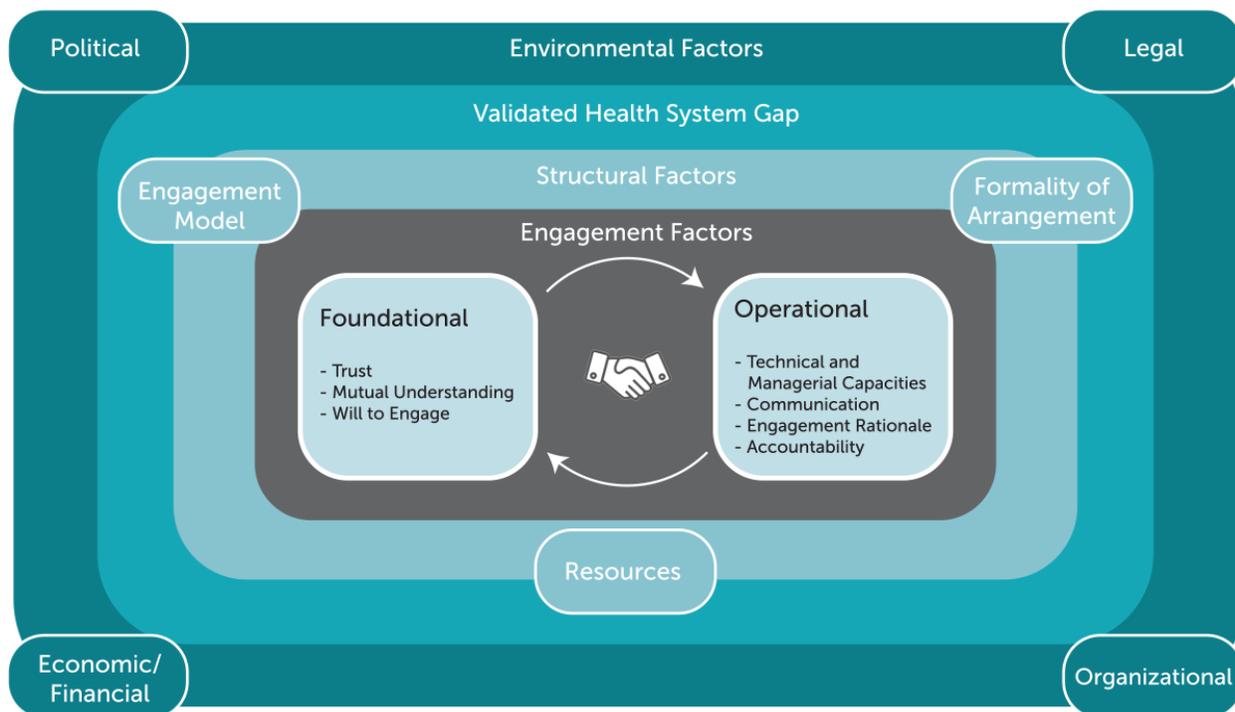
Building on these findings, along with tacit knowledge, previous work² and input from global experts and local partners, the project brought these “hard” and “soft” factors together to understand and propose a more holistic framework that describes a comprehensive PPE

¹ Defined as “the deliberate, systematic collaboration of the government and the private health sector according to national health priorities, beyond individual interventions and programmes.” International Finance Corporation. 2011. Healthy Partnerships: How Governments Can Engage the Private Sector to Improve Health in Africa. *World Bank*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2304>

² Blanchet N, Ishtiaq A, Thomas C. 2018. Engagement of the Private Sector in Advancing Universal Health Coverage: Understanding and Navigating Major Factors for Success. In: Kickbusch I, Sturchio JL, Galambos L et al., eds., *The Road to Universal Health Coverage: Innovation, Equity, and the New Health Economy*. Baltimore, USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 65-90.

Ecosystem (**Figure 1**). The PPE Ecosystem below recognizes that PPEs exist as part of a complex network of helping or hindering factors and multiple health system actors operating at various points in an engagement cycle.

Figure 1. Public-Private Engagement Ecosystem: Factors for effective engagement



PPE Ecosystem Factors

The PPE Ecosystem (**Figure 1**) consists of three factor “sets”: Environmental, Structural, and Engagement factors as well as a validated health systems gap. These factors are described in more detail below:

1. **Environmental factors** shape the operating environment for a given PPE. Individual actors in an engagement likely have indirect (if any) influence on these factors but the factors may impact the engagement’s effectiveness and should be considered. These include political, economic, legal, and organizational factors described in detail in work by Blanchet et al. (2018).

Environmental Factors	Definitions	Actor Level of Influence
Economic/Financial	National and subnational policies, laws, and regulations that govern the public financial management system, provider payment mechanisms, and access to capital	Actors have indirect control or no control over these factors
Legal	Laws and regulations that govern the behavior of healthcare providers and organizations and partnerships or engagements between government and private sector actors	
Political	Political and cultural ideology current narrative; process for adoption and execution of health policies including the distribution of resources for health	
Organizational	How public and private health care delivery is organized across the health system (e.g., decentralized management of public health system, individual or networked private providers)	

2. **Structural factors** that define the architecture of a given PPE including the type of partnership model, formalities of the model arrangement and available resources to implement the engagement. The actors implicated in the engagement generally have some control over these factors.

Structural Factors	Definitions	Actor Level of Influence
Engagement model	The model arrangement and types of actors involved, e.g., bilateral or multilateral arrangement, inclusion of a trusted broker, etc.	Actors have some control over these factors
Formality of arrangement	The formal or informal arrangement for the engagement, e.g., a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or contract (whether legally binding or not).	
Resources	The financial and non-financial resources available for the functioning of the engagement.	

3. **Engagement factors** relate to the actors implicated in the engagement. Generally, engagement actors have control over these factors. Engagement factors are categorized into foundational and operational dimensions described below:

Foundational: The foundational dimensions include factors central to the relationship dynamics and interactions between the public and private sector actors involved in a PPE, including their level of trust in one another; their mutual understanding of each other’s roles, motivations, and capacities; and their willingness to expend time and effort engaging with one another.

Foundational dimensions/ sub-dimensions	Definitions	Actor Level of Influence
Will to engage	The intention, interest, or commitment of the individual PPE actor and their institutions to enter and sustain the engagement.	Actors have control over these factors
Capacity to engage (“Can”)	At the individual level, the extent to which sector actors have the knowledge and skills to engage with the opposite sector. At the institutional level, the extent to which the institutions of sector actors have the resources and mechanisms needed to engage with the opposite sector.	
Mandate to engage (“Must”)	At the individual level, the extent to which sector actors feel a sense of duty to engage with the opposite sector. At the institutional level, the extent to which the institutions of sector actors create and enforce policies and regulations around engagement with the opposite sector.	
Desire to engage (“Want”)	At the individual level, the extent to which sector actors value and prioritize engagement with the opposite sector based on perceived benefit of engagement. At the institutional level, the extent to which an institution supports engagement with the opposite sector.	
Trust	The belief that the opposite sector is acting in good faith and has the goodwill and integrity to effectively participate in an engagement (i.e., will not allow personal benefits to negatively impact the engagement).	
Mutual Understanding	The understanding of the opposite sector’s capacities, motivations, resources, and role in the health system. To increase mutual understanding, both sectors must identify and overcome negative misconceptions about the opposite sector.	

Operational: Building on the bedrock of the foundational dimensions, the operational dimensions include factors that support the overall functioning of a PPE. These include the rationale or overall goal for participating in a PPE, as well as the knowledge and skills of the partners — related both to the technical area of focus (e.g., maternal health) and the capacities to effectively manage the activities of the engagement. And, of course, the operational dimensions also include the communication and accountability mechanisms that support day-to-day operations.

Operational dimensions/ sub-dimensions	Definitions	Actor Level of Influence
Communication	The process and approach used by sector partners to exchange information and participate in dialogue.	Actors have control over these factors
Mechanism	The types of communication mechanisms used between sectors, both formal (with structure, rules, and accountability) and informal, including virtual and in-person communication.	
Frequency	How often and with what regularity the sectors communicate with one another.	
Quality	The level of transparency in information sharing between the sectors, including data sharing. The extent to which communication between sectors involves active dialogue (including joint agenda setting and is participatory and productive) versus passive communication (just dissemination of information).	
Engagement Rationale	The basis and motivation for the engagement (related to a validated health system gap), including mutual benefit through pursuit of common goals and the underlying motives of each sector partner.	
Common Goal	The extent to which sector partners articulate and agree on a common goal or objectives that can be achieved through public-private engagement.	
Complementary Motives	The extent to which the independent motives of sector partners are complementary and supportive to the common goal (versus contradictory). Motives are the underlying reasons, purpose, or intentions of public and private actors in entering a PPE or pursuing a common goal.	
Technical and managerial capacities	The capacities of PPE actors related to the technical area of PPE focus as well as project management and joint leadership.	
Technical	Ability to understand and provide feedback on technical area of discussion (e.g., maternal health)	
Project Management	Ability to mobilize and manage financial resources, plan and execute work, set and hold meetings, and conduct monitoring functions	
Joint Leadership	Ability for the people in management positions to properly lead teams, motivate across stakeholders and build consensus among divergent perspectives; members of both sectors take on leadership roles and have a seat at the table	
Accountability	The process and approach used by sector partners to hold one another accountable for carrying out their roles and responsibilities in a PPE.	
Roles & Responsibilities	Refers to (1) whether sector actors have articulated clearly defined roles within an engagement, and (2) the extent to which sector actors understand and agree on their roles in the engagement and the roles of the opposite sector.	
Empowerment	The extent to which sector partners feel held accountable for carrying out activities under an engagement and feel able to hold the opposite sector accountable.	
Mechanism	Formal (i.e., clauses included in MOUs or contracts) or informal mechanisms used to hold PPE actors accountable for carrying out their roles and responsibilities.	

In addition to the factor sets, the framework references the **validated health system gap**. This gap refers to the health system problem or challenge identified by stakeholder(s), which the engagement is seeking to solve. This gap should be based on evidence, aligned with beneficiary demand, and validated by a critical mass of stakeholder(s) within the health system. PPEs that ensure they are responding to a validated health system gap may be more likely to succeed.

Why is this Ecosystem important?

Public and private sector stakeholders, trusted brokers and the donor community alike often ask questions like: *what is the “right” structure for a public-private engagement?* and *how can you determine a country’s “readiness” for a public-private engagement?* While there is no health system blueprint or ideal arrangement of factors in a health system that will ensure successful PPE, the Ecosystem described here encourages consideration of a range of factors and their interconnectivity when designing and implementing PPEs.

Please refer to the **Journey Guide for Effective Public-Private Engagement in Health** for information and tools to help practitioners apply this PPE Ecosystem.

The Strengthening Mixed Health Systems project is supported by funding from Merck, through Merck for Mothers, the company's global initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die while giving life. Merck for Mothers is known as MSD for Mothers outside the United States and Canada.



