Building resilience through integrated health systems strengthening: policy and planning analysis

Saqif Mustafa

S Mustafa[1,2], G McDarby[1,3]
[1]WHO, Geneva, Switzerland
[2]University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
[3]Health Services Executive, Dublin, Ireland
Contact: mustafasa@who.int

Health system strengthening towards universal health coverage and health security are key objectives promoted by health policy actors. However, bringing together these agendas has presented challenges. Health investments are often reactive and siloed e.g. emergency and humanitarian response programmes. There has been disinvestment in public health and primary health care (PHC), and limited linkages with allied sectors (e.g. environmental and animal health). There is a need to better understand policies that promote integration and enable effective response to threats such as COVID-19 in tandem with maintaining routine health system functions (e.g. PHC and essential individual and population health services). We conducted document analysis of national health sector, security and public health policies and plans and drew on perspectives of key stakeholders to investigate integration using a health systems resilience framework. We examined the extent and manner in which policies are integrated to enable national and subnational systems to prepare for, prevent and adapt to shocks while maintaining routine and essential functions. While we identified a recognition of the need for better integration to promote health security within health systems strengthening efforts and vice versa including strengthening governance, accountability and capacity for stewardship within national and local health and allied authorities, evidence of such an approach was limited. National laws to support IHR (2005) implementation were often outdated and insufficient to produce the policy environment for multi-sectoral working. In 2020, only 47% of national COVID-19 plans from 106 countries considered the maintenance of non-COVID-19 essential health services - a key component of health systems resilience. Policies which strengthen PHC services and preventative interventions can be cost-effective and efficient whilst bridging pandemic response and other essential functions of the health system.

Key messages:
- COVID-19 is an opportunity to promote and sustain greater integration and inter- and multisectoral engagement.
- Everyone can play a role to foster an integrated approach focussing on preventative, cost-effective health services to ensure health systems resilience.