

Measuring the Strength of National Social Service Systems

New PEPFAR indicators help governments and their partners know where their investments are paying off and where to push harder

Recognizing that effective national systems of economic, social, and health services directly support the achievement of an AIDS-free generation, the United States Government and others have made substantial investments to strengthen these systems around the world. So far, the results for social service system strengthening are largely unknown, in the absence of a way to capture and measure them.

To solve this problem, MEASURE Evaluation, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has developed a set of 32 core indicators to assess the outcomes of efforts to strengthen social service systems.¹ The project was funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Applying these indicators can help a government and its partners gain a clear picture of what's working and what needs attention. The indicators help to answer the following questions:

- What is the current status of the national social service system?
- Is the system showing signs of improvement?
- Are investments from donors and other sources making the system stronger?
- Is the system being developed sustainably?

What do the indicators measure?

These new monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators are in line with PEPFAR's 2012 Guidance for Orphans and Vulnerable Children Programming, which emphasizes strong country ownership and a capacity building and systems strengthening approach. They measure the five components of a functional social service system that PEPFAR deems essential:

- 1. Leadership and governance:** laws and policies that promote, coordinate, and regulate the provision of governmental and nongovernmental child welfare and protection services.
- 2. Social service workforce:** well-trained and effectively deployed governmental and nongovernmental staff who work individually or collectively to address the needs of vulnerable populations—especially children and families.
- 3. Financing:** mobilizing, accumulating, and allocating money in sustainable ways to cover the child welfare and protection needs of vulnerable populations.
- 4. Information management and accountability systems:** processes for collecting, analyzing, disseminating, and using data on child welfare and protection policies and programs.
- 5. Coordination and networking mechanisms:** mechanisms for all actors working in child welfare and protection to develop and implement policy, share information, and coordinate services.

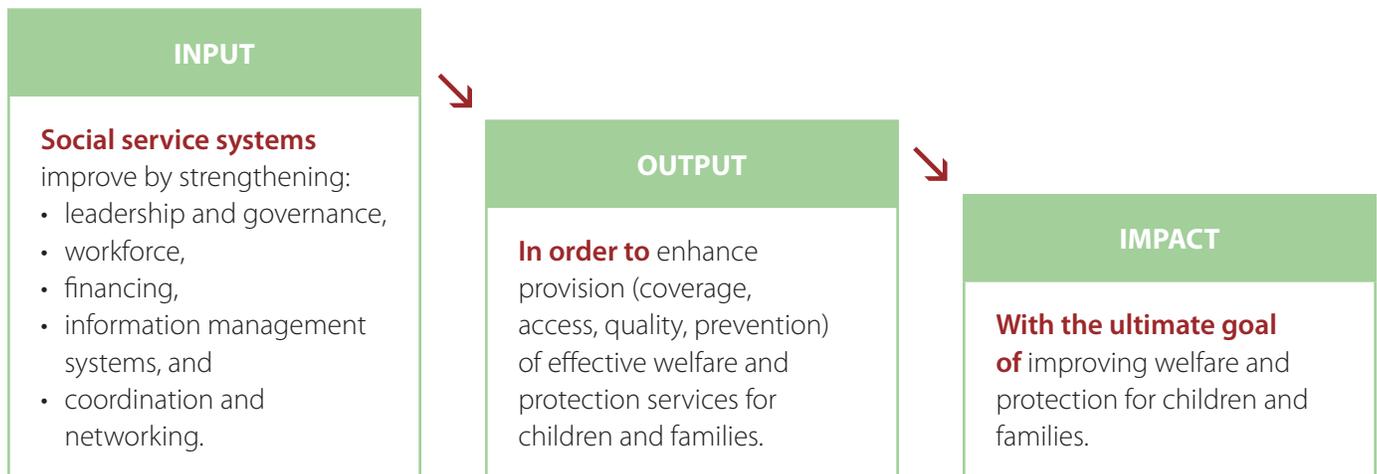
Why are the indicators needed?

Interventions that focus on distinct areas of concern such as HIV, child labor, household income, and education are valuable and necessary. Implementing them in tandem with systems strengthening results in integrated and more sustainable social services for children and households, and so it is vital to know where investments are needed most.

These indicators can give governments a snapshot of a system's strengths and weaknesses—information that can be used to develop and monitor an action plan, with strategies and goals. Any system—nascent or advanced—can benefit from their application.

1) Publication is forthcoming: *Indicators for Strengthening a National Social Service System*.

The Logic of Strengthening Social Service Systems



The figure above shows the indicators' fundamental value in the spectrum of efforts to improve child and household well-being.

Measuring programmatic impact requires a discrete set of indicators based on special data sources and studies. A companion product—MEASURE Evaluation's *Child, Caregiver and Household Well-being Survey Toolkit*—takes this step. The toolkit is available at: www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/our-work/ovc/ovc-program-evaluation-tool-kit

Because each setting is complex, benefiting from a wide range of services implemented by governmental and nongovernmental providers and a multitude of stakeholders, the indicators cannot be used to draw comparisons between countries. The indicators assess the government-led, or formal, social service system. Indicators to assess the nongovernmental, or informal, social service system, are critical for program and policy development, but are not included in the current set of indicators.

What research went into these indicators?

MEASURE Evaluation engaged the global community of experts on orphans and vulnerable children, child welfare, and child and social protection by conducting a review of 64 documents and consulting more than 40 stakeholders representing donors, U.S. government agencies, international voluntary organizations and consulting firms, and academics. More than 300 indicators related to system strengthening emerged. A team of M&E experts refined this list, and the result is this set of 32 highly vetted indicators to measure the outcomes of social service system strengthening.

For more information

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