

Accelerating Universal Health Coverage Progress in Nigeria

2018 UHC Day Press Release

In the words of the Immediate past Director General of World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Margret Chan, Universal Health Coverage (UHC), defined as access of all citizens to quality health care they need without suffering financial hardship, is the single most important concept that Public Health has to offer.

UHC aspiration is not only about expanding access of citizens to quality health care with financial protection but it's also an economic, social and political imperative. Therefore, global crusade geared towards advancing UHC cause has gained momentum and it's now captured in the global development agenda as target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a member of global comity of nations, Nigeria has subscribed to the UHC agenda and the health policy thrust of the current administration i.e. PHC for UHC aligns with the global UHC goal. However, a lot need to be done if Nigeria will make significant progress towards achieving UHC goal. The health financing landscape in the country is at variance with international minimum standard for achieving UHC. The government health investment of 0.7% of GDP is one of the lowest in the world and country that make significant progress in the journey of UHC spend at least 5% of their GDP on health. In the same vein, proportion of Nigerians that are covered by any form of financial protection is less than 5%. In other words, about 95% of the population is only a sickness away from poverty due to inadequate social safety net. Considering the recent revelation that Nigeria has the highest number of extremely poor people in the world, UHC should be accorded high priority among poverty eradication measures.

While Nigeria government and stakeholders should be commended for embarking on major policy reforms such as health insurance decentralization and introduction Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF) which is an earmarked fund for purchasing Basic Minima Package of Care for every Nigerian, all hands must be on deck to fast track these promising policy reforms in order to change the unacceptable narrative of abysmal health indices in the country. Furthermore, all states in the country need to articulate clear policy direction on health financing that will guarantee adequate investment, efficient utilization of resources and effective engagement of the private sector. There is need for a paradigm shift from input based financing to a more productive strategic purchasing that plays a premium on efficient utilization of fund to buy desired health outcome instead of treating investment on health service inputs as the ultimate.

While Nigeria lawmakers at both national and state level have demonstrated improved responsiveness towards the health need of the citizens through the platform of Legislative Network for UHC, stakeholders need to further engage the lawmakers to better harness and align their statutory functions of appropriation, legislation, oversight and accountability to the UHC agenda of the country.

As the country approaches the electioneering period, efforts should be made to put health on the political front burner and aspirants to political offices and their political platforms should be subjected to policy scrutiny in order to elicit their understanding of health issues and appraise their health related agenda. The media should also lend their voice to the UHC crusade by awakening the citizens to their health right and hold policy makers accountable for implementation of UHC related policies including efficient utilization of public resources on health service delivery.

Considering the position and influence of Nigeria in Africa, achieving UHC is not only a great feat for government and people of the country but also a magnificent impetus for UHC quest across the continent. As the world marks the 2018 World UHC Day with the theme “Unite for Universal Health Coverage: now is the time for collective action”, nothing else summarizes the needed action to accelerate UHC progress in Nigeria than this theme.

Signed

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