

Health policy reform

Mr Moses Mukosha

University of Zambia

Email: moses.mukosha@unza.zm

Learning outcomes

- Define health systems policy
- Discuss key areas of reform
- Analyse health systems policy from global to local context
- Evaluate common goals of reforms

Overview

Health policy reform involves fundamental changes to how a country's health system operates, focusing on areas like **governance, provision, financing, and resource generation.**

These reforms aim to improve the overall performance of the health sector and ultimately the health of the population.

Common goals include **broadening access to healthcare, improving quality of care, and reducing costs**

Key areas of reform

Governance

- This involves strengthening the structure and function of the healthcare system, including roles and responsibilities of different actors.

Provision

- Reforms in this area focus on how healthcare services are delivered, including expanding access, improving the quality of care, and ensuring efficiency.

Financing

- This involves how healthcare is funded, including exploring different financing mechanisms and ensuring equitable access to care, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Resource Generation

- This focuses on how resources are allocated within the health system, ensuring they are used effectively and efficiently.

Brain storm

Mention some goals of health reform

Common Goals of Health Reform

Increased access to healthcare:

- This includes expanding coverage through public or private insurance programs and improving access to specialists and other healthcare providers.

Improved quality of care:

- This can involve implementing quality standards, training healthcare professionals, and improving the effectiveness of treatments.

Reduced costs:

- Reforms can aim to lower the overall cost of healthcare by improving efficiency, implementing cost-sharing mechanisms, and promoting preventive care.

Equity:

- Ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have access to quality healthcare services.

Definitions

- Health sector reform (HSR) has been defined as *‘a sustained process of fundamental changes in national health policy and institutional arrangements guided by government and designed to improve the functioning and performance of the health sector and ultimately the health status of the population’*,
- HSR is sustained purposeful changes to improve the efficiency, equity, and effectiveness of the health sector
 - ✓ Deliberate (purposive than haphazard)
 - ✓ Planned and intended to make long term permanent changes
 - ✓ It is normally a political and top down process led by national regional or local governments

Key elements in the definition

The broad goal of HSR was to influence the performance of the health system towards

- Equity
- Efficiency
- Access mobilization of additional resources for health
- Improvement in quality
- Improved system performance and sustainability

Health sector reform agenda or areas

- Institution reform
- Delivery of health services
- Financing of health services
- Partnerships
- Management
- Management support systems

Institutional reforms

- Redefinition of roles and functions including restructuring of Ministry of Health
- Review/formulation of necessary policies, strategies et
- Decentralization (e.g creation of district health management teams)
- Strengthening institutional capacity
- District strengthening
- Purchaser-provider splits

Delivery of health services

- Extension of coverage of health services
- Integration of services
- Definition of a basic package of health services
- Human resources for health development
- Provision of essential drugs
- Improved prescribing practices
- Improved referral system

Financing of health services

- Increased budgetary allocation
- Broadening resource base-introduction of user charges, health insurance
- Improved management of resources
- Use of cost effective interventions

Partnerships

- Sector wide approaches
- Promotion of public private mix
- Promotion of traditional medicine
- Inter-sectoral action for health
- Promotion of community participation
- Coordination of health development partners

Management

- Hospital autonomy reforms
- Changing the status of health workers from civil service to contract workers
- Using new provider payment methods

Management support system

- Drug and supplies procurement and distribution systems
- Laboratory support services system
- Health management information system

Challenges to health reforms

Political resistance

- Implementing health reforms can face resistance from various stakeholders, including providers, payers, and the public.

Limited resources

- Implementing reforms can require significant investments, which may be difficult to secure.

Lack of capacity

- Many countries lack the necessary infrastructure and trained personnel to implement reforms effectively.

Complexity of healthcare systems

- Healthcare systems are complex and interconnected, making it difficult to implement reforms without disrupting the system

Global Health policy reform

- Global health policy reform encompasses fundamental changes in **health systems**, including **policies and institutions, often driven by governments.**
- It focuses on improving equity, efficiency, quality, financing, and sustainability of healthcare services, while defining priorities, refining policies, and reforming implementation structures
- Health system framework is instrumental in strengthening the overall health system and uses as catalyst for achieving global health targets such as the universal health coverage
- Unlike other health system strengthening strategies which are disease specific or narrow, the WHO health system framework intends to improve the overall health in responsive, financially fair and most efficient way

Health reform context

- Began around 1980, as countries in sub-Saharan Africa were experiencing significant economic problems after world recession induced by world oil crisis of 1979
- Health systems were operating under severe constraints in form of critically low funding, shortages of staff, erratic drug supplies
- Health outcomes such as mortality or life expectancy were poor in most countries
- 1987 Bamako initiative was one of the first continental attempts to revive and reform health systems in Africa
- World bank better health in Africa 1994 set forth a new vision of health improvement through process of health sector reform in Africa

Key Aspects of Global Health Policy Reform

Focus Areas: Equity, efficiency, quality, financing, and sustainability of healthcare.

Implementation: Reforms are often guided by government policies and institutional arrangements.

Success Factors: How the reform process is applied and by whom, rather than just the content of the policies.

Importance of Information: Sustained information and education are needed to build political and public support.

Continuous Monitoring: Ongoing monitoring and review of health system development are crucial.

Global Health Policy (GHP): Concerned with translating evidence and political will into public agreement and interventions.

Health reforms-local context

Zambia's health policy reforms have focused on improving access to healthcare, particularly for the **poor and in rural areas**, and on creating a more **equitable and efficient healthcare system**.

This has involved **decentralizing healthcare, improving financing and resource allocation**, and **strengthening primary health care**.

Main aspects of Zambia's health reform

Decentralization

- The government has decentralized healthcare, transferring some functions of the Ministry of Health to local authorities to tailor service delivery to local needs and improve community engagement.

Financing and Resource Allocation:

- Zambia has implemented reforms to streamline the flow of resources to frontline facilities and providers, including mechanisms to enhance accountability and results-based financing.

Primary Health Care (PHC) Strengthening:

- The reforms emphasize strengthening PHC, including expanding PHC infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, and increasing community outreach and prevention activities.

Equity and Access

- Zambia prioritizes equitable access to healthcare, reducing financial barriers to care and ensuring that funding flows reflect local poverty levels.

Multi-sectoral Collaboration

- The 2022-2026 national health **strategic plan** focuses on addressing the **health sector** challenges and accelerating progress towards attainment of the national and global health goals. The plan calls for strong multi-sectoral collaboration and partnerships to address the social determinants of health, such as education, agriculture, and sanitation.

Vision 2030

- Zambia's National Vision 2030 prioritizes health and aims to achieve "equity of access to cost-effective, quality health services, as close to the family as possible".

National Health Insurance Scheme

- Zambia has also implemented a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to address financial barriers to accessing healthcare and to improve access to quality healthcare

Resources

- <http://www.drussa.net/>
- <http://www.health-policy-systems.com/supplements/7/s1>