Dear Colleague,

A group of the world’s leading health financing experts came together last year to pen an article reiterating their concerns about LMICs embracing social health insurance. Their critique centers around the use of payroll taxes and member contributions to raise revenue for the scheme. The case for such an approach being particularly ill-suited for Africa was made by one of these experts in 1996. And yet this idea forms the basis for health financing strategies that many African countries have adopted to achieve universal health coverage.

In a paper published last month in BMJ Global Health, colleagues from KEMRI Wellcome Trust and I offer further evidence that this penchant for social health insurance is misguided. Using Demographic and Health Survey data, we show that health insurance coverage is low and pro-rich across 36 African countries, largely due to a reliance on contributory approaches. Based on this finding, we urge ministries of health on the continent to embrace general tax financing instead.

Given this reality, should we be rushing to integrate priority health services—specifically family planning (FP)—into nascent national health insurance (NHI) schemes? In a recent blog, we urge FP advocates keen to extend contraceptive coverage to the poor to rethink putting all their eggs in the NHI basket. Indeed, NHI may not be the ideal way to extend FP coverage to certain population segments, even when population coverage is high.

We will be exploring these questions in ThinkWell’s inaugural Counterpoint webinar on June 3. See below for more on the webinar and new learning resources from the SP4PHC team.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and feedback! And if you know someone who might like to receive this newsletter, please share the sign-up link with them.

Regards,

Nirmala Ravishankar, PhD
SP4PHC Program Director
ThinkWell
Putting the "Universal" into "UHC Schemes" for Family Planning

Please join us on June 3 at 11:00am EST to hear from health systems and family planning specialists (Joe Kutzin, Jacob Kazungu, Prastuti Soewondo, Sophie Witter, Brendan Hayes, Elisha Dunn-Georgiou, Caitlin Mazzilli, Matt Boxshall, and Nirmala Ravishankar) as they share insights on whether national health insurance approaches are best suited to reach people most in-need with high-quality family planning services. We hope to see you there!

Examining Health Insurance Coverage in sub-Saharan African Countries

After assessing health insurance coverage in 36 sub-Saharan African countries, SP4PHC Program Director Nirmala Ravishankar and collaborators from KEMRI Wellcome Trust found that most of the studied countries should reconsider voluntary, contributory health insurance mechanisms and instead reorient their health financing system towards non-contributory, tax-funded arrangements.
Health Financing Flows in Uganda

Developed with Uganda's Ministry of Health, this report documents the nature and magnitude of financial flows to Uganda's health sector and the purchase of primary health care services. This is a companion piece to our review of the purchasing landscape in Uganda completed last year.

Country-specific Factsheets on FP, MNCH, and Health Purchasing

SP4PHC works to improve how FP, MNCH, and other services are purchased. As a reference and to visualize the latest data, trends, and our strategies, each SP4PHC team published country-specific factsheets on our three topic areas. You can find these factsheets within each SP4PHC country's webpage: Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Kenya, Philippines, and Uganda.
International Health Economics Association (iHEA) Congress

In July, SP4PHC staff will participate in two organized sessions and four poster sessions at the International Health Economics Association (iHEA) Congress on topics ranging from public financial management issues for purchasing to how devolution impacts health financing functions. You can register here.

Sixth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2020)

You can now watch the recordings of the recent HSR2020 sessions we led and participated in:

- Strengthening Capacity for Strategic Purchasing
- Adjusting purchasing arrangements to support the COVID-19 response: A global overview and country insights
- Public financial management challenges and innovations: Learning from the COVID-19 health response

LATEST BLOGS

- Improving Access to High Quality Family Planning by Putting the “Universal” into “UHC Schemes”
- Is Kenya’s National Hospital Insurance Fund Amendment Bill a Silver Bullet for Universal Health Coverage?
How can Decades of Learning from Voucher Schemes in Uganda Inform Ongoing Purchasing Reforms?