



SP4PHC
Strategic Purchasing for
Primary Health Care

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LINDA MAMA SCHEME IN ISIOLO COUNTY

Linda Mama is the Government of Kenya's flagship universal entitlement program for free maternity services. It is funded by the Ministry of Health and managed by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). As part of the Strategic Purchasing for Primary Health Care project (SP4PHC), ThinkWell has been supporting the County Government of Isiolo to improve the implementation of the scheme in its public facilities. This brief provides an overview of the Linda Mama scheme implementation in the county between the fiscal year (FY)¹ 2018/19 and the first six months of FY 2021/22 and discusses measures the County Government of Isiolo can take to improve the scheme's performance.

BACKGROUND

Linda Mama is a publicly funded scheme managed by NHIF to ensure that all pregnant Kenyan women and their infants have access to high-quality and affordable health services. Any pregnant woman can register for Linda Mama for free at any NHIF service center, participating public or private providers, a *huduma* center that offers government services countrywide, or NHIF registration portal, or by using a mobile phone. The benefits package includes antenatal care (ANC), normal delivery, caesarean section (C-section), and postnatal care (PNC). NHIF reimburses providers directly for services utilized by scheme beneficiaries based on claims submitted by providers (NHIF n.d.).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this brief is to document the performance of the Linda Mama scheme in Isiolo County between FY 2018/19 and the first six months of FY 2021/22. This brief has drawn on data obtained from health facilities (dispensaries, health centers, and hospitals), the NHIF local branch, and the District Health Information System 2 (DHIS2). In

addition, the team conducted consultations with county officials and facility managers.

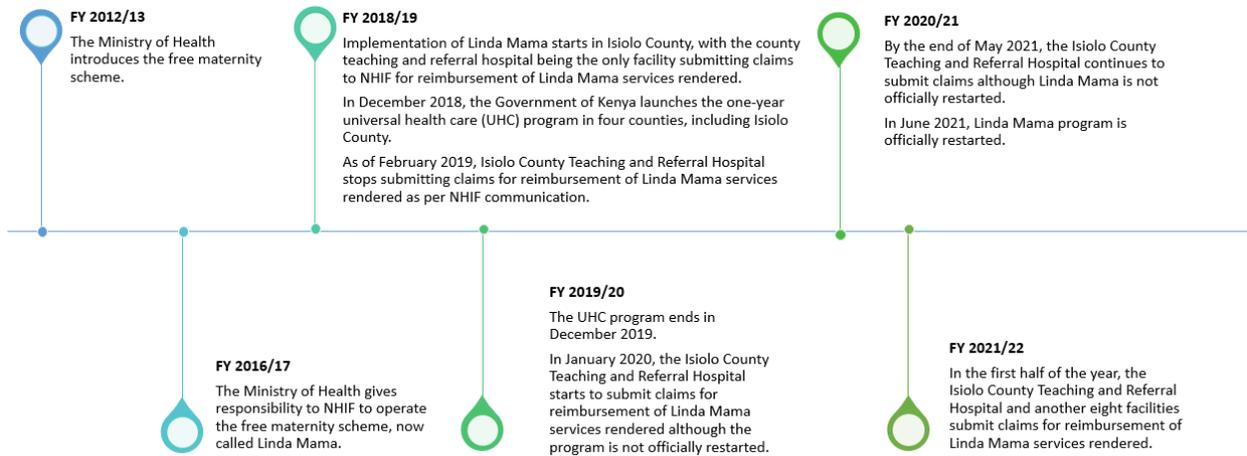
LINDA MAMA IN ISIOLO COUNTY

Figure 1 provides an overview of the Linda Mama scheme implementation in Isiolo County. This section describes the scheme's performance since the start of its implementation in FY 2018/19 until the end of the first half of FY 2021/22.

In FY 2018/19, of the 71 facilities in Isiolo County, only the county teaching and referral hospital was empaneled to NHIF and was set up to submit claims for reimbursement for Linda Mama services rendered. This can be explained by the lack of internet connection and of dedicated staff to submit claims in other health facilities in the county. In addition, the limited financial and managerial autonomy of health facilities acted as a disincentive for them to submit claims given that they were not allowed to retain and spend NHIF reimbursements.

¹ The Kenyan FY runs from July 1 to June 30 of the next calendar year.

Figure 1. Overview of Linda Mama program implementation in Isiolo County

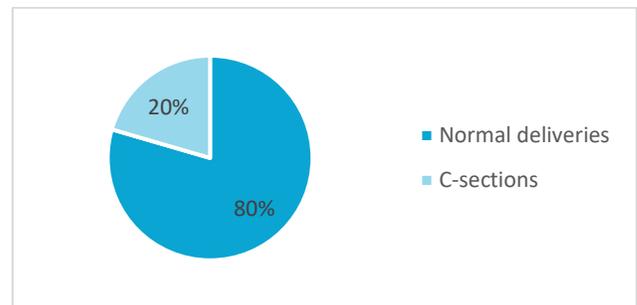


Source: Authors

The Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital submitted claims only for reimbursement for normal deliveries and C-sections in FY 2018/19.

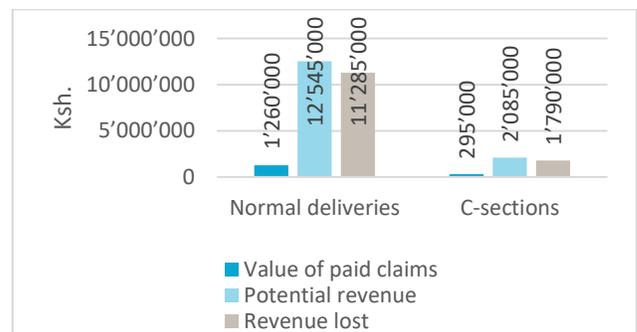
This is because the Linda Mama reimbursement rates for these services are higher than the ones for ANC and PNC services. In addition, uptake of PNC services is generally low. The hospital submitted a total of 288 claims, the majority for normal deliveries (Figure 2).² The value of claims reimbursed by NHIF amounted to Ksh. 1,555,000, with normal deliveries and C-sections accounting for 81% and 19% of the value of claims reimbursed, respectively (Figure 3). By not submitting claims for all the normal deliveries and C-sections, Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital lost Ksh. 13,075,000 (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Breakdown of claims submitted by Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital, FY 2018/19



Source: Authors, based on facility records

Figure 3. Value of claimed services, and potential and lost revenue by Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital, FY 2018/19



Source: Authors, based on NHIF Local Branch Isiolo 2021; DHIS2 2022

² In FY 2018/19, there were 2,509 normal deliveries and 417 C-sections in the county.

In the second half of FY 2018/19 and the first half of FY 2019/20, health facilities in Isiolo stopped claiming for reimbursement of services offered under the Linda Mama scheme following the launch of the one-year universal health care (UHC) program. The Government of Kenya piloted the UHC program in four counties, of which Isiolo was one.³ All user fees at public hospitals were discontinued, and the national government sent additional resources to the counties in which the program was piloted. The UHC program started in December 2018, but the Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital continued to submit claims to NHIF and receive reimbursements until February 1, 2019. This is when NHIF verbally communicated to facilities that it stopped reimbursements for Linda Mama services. NHIF also sent formal written communication later on. Given that all services were free of charge in public facilities regardless of their level and that counties received funds for the lost revenue, there was no need for additional reimbursement under Linda Mama. Moreover, given that only the Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital submitted and received reimbursements from NHIF for the Linda Mama services rendered, the rest of public facilities in the county did not lose money when NHIF stopped paying claims. Nevertheless, the Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital could have received considerable reimbursements if NHIF had not stopped paying claims (see below). The UHC program officially ended in December 2019 (at the end of the first half of FY 2019/20).

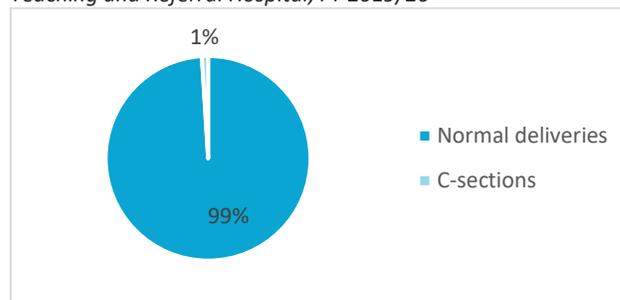
Although Linda Mama was not restarted immediately after the end of the UHC program, the Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital started to submit Linda Mama claims for reimbursement from NHIF. It was the only facility in the county submitting claims in FY 2019/20 after the end of the UHC program, and these were only for normal deliveries and C-sections. In total, the hospital submitted 205 claims, almost all of them for normal deliveries (Figure 4).⁴ The value of claims reimbursed by NHIF amounted to Ksh. 1,025,000.

³ Access [this brief](#) for more information about the implementation of the UHC program in Isiolo County.

⁴ In FY 2019/20, there were 2,316 normal deliveries and 446 C-sections in the county.

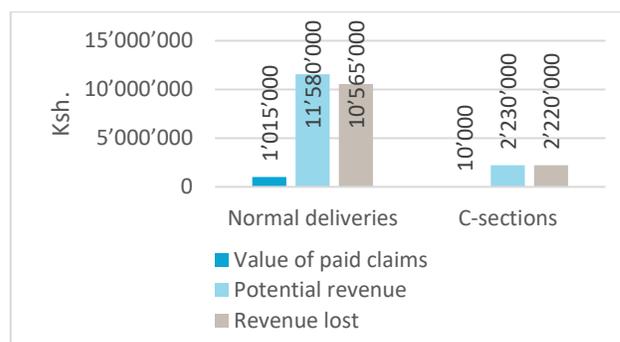
Normal deliveries accounted for 99% of the value of claims reimbursed (Figure 5). By not submitting claims for all the normal deliveries and C-sections, Isiolo County Referral Hospital lost Ksh. 12,785,000 (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Breakdown of claims submitted by Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital, FY 2019/20



Source: Authors, based on facility records

Figure 5. Value of claimed services, and potential and lost revenue by Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital, FY 2019/20



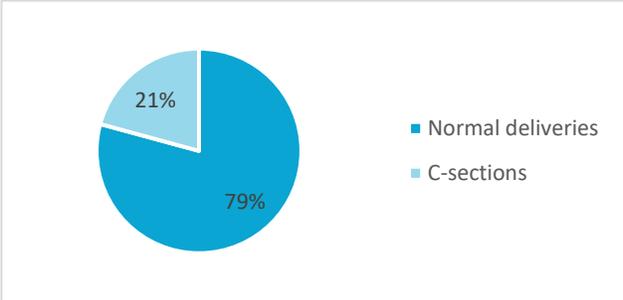
Source: Authors, based on NHIF Local Branch Isiolo 2021; DHIS2 2022

The Linda Mama program was not restarted in Isiolo County until June 2021. Nevertheless, the County Department of Health (CDOH), supported by ThinkWell, made a formal request to the Ministry of Health and NHIF to allow the Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital to be reimbursed for the 1,276 claims made for Linda Mama services rendered between January 2021 and May 2021 (Figure 6).⁵

⁵ In FY 2020/21, there were 2,122 normal deliveries and 411 C-sections in the county.

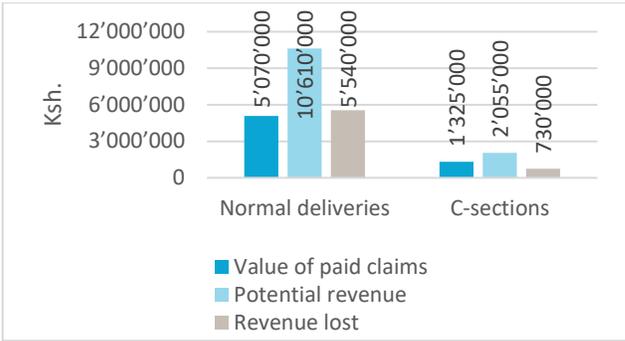
Therefore, the Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital received Ksh. 6,395,000 from NHIF (Figure 7). In June 2021, CDOH and ThinkWell engaged with both the Ministry of Health and NHIF to officially restart the Linda Mama program. Specifically, a health financing taskforce, which included representatives from the country health management team and leadership, was established. ThinkWell collaborated with CDOH to include a representative from NHIF in the taskforce to ensure the restart of the Linda Mama program and to improve its performance in the county. One major outcome of this taskforce was the revival of monthly meetings with facility in-charges to discuss factors that facilitate or hinder implementation of the Linda Mama program, with a focus on the claims submission process. In addition, the County Government of Isiolo started to equip facilities with mobile phones, tablets, and desktops to improve their capacity to submit claims. NHIF, CDOH, and ThinkWell supported training of facility staff to access the NHIF electronic system to submit claims for Linda Mama services rendered but also to make sure that they are familiar with the Linda Mama benefits package and reimbursement rates. Corroborated with follow-up by the facility accountants with NHIF on the status of submitted claims, and regular communication between CDOH, NHIF local branch, and health facilities, nine public facilities in Isiolo started to submit claims in the first half of FY 2021/22 (July-December 2021).

Figure 6. Breakdown of claims submitted by Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital, FY 2020/21



Source: Authors, based on facility records

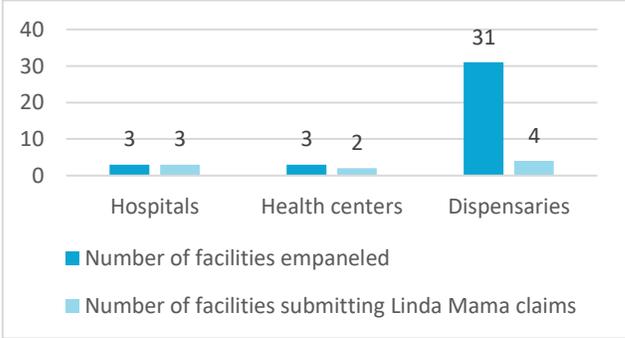
Figure 7. Value of claimed services, and potential and lost revenue by Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital, FY 2020/21



Source: Authors, based on NHIF Local Branch Isiolo 2021

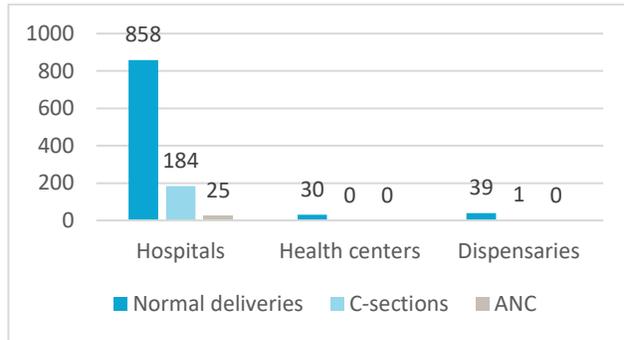
While all three hospitals in Isiolo County started to submit claims for reimbursement for Linda Mama services rendered, two of three empaneled health centers and four of 31 empaneled dispensaries in the county also submitted claims in the first half of FY 2021/22 (Figure 8). Hospitals submitted 92% of the claims in the first six months of FY 2021/22 (Figure 9 and Figure 10). Isiolo County Teaching and Referral Hospital was the facility that submitted most of the claims in the county (83%). Although claims for normal deliveries and C-sections continued to account for the majority of the claims submitted (82% and 16%, respectively) due to the higher reimbursement rates, facilities started submitting claims for ANC services as well (Figure 11).

Figure 8. Overview of facilities empanelment vs. facilities submitting Linda Mama claims, first half of FY 2021/22



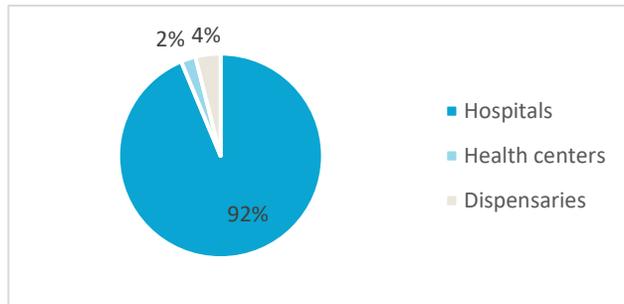
Source: Authors, based on facility records and NHIF Local Branch Isiolo 2021

Figure 9. Number of claims submitted by type of facility and type of service, first half of FY 2021/22



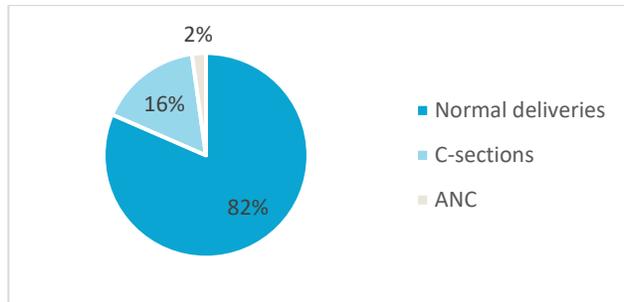
Source: Authors, based on facility records

Figure 10. Contribution to number of claims by type of facility, first half of FY 2021/22



Source: Authors, based on facility records

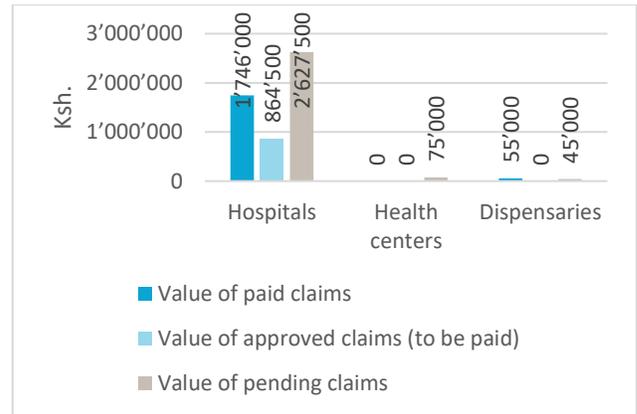
Figure 11. Contribution to number of claims by type of service, first half of FY 2021/22



Source: Authors, based on facility records

The total value of claims submitted by the nine health facilities was Ksh. 5,413,000 in the first half of FY 2021/22. NHIF paid a third of the value of these claims. Hospitals received the highest payments, followed by dispensaries (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Value of claims paid vs. approved vs. pending in the nine health facilities submitting claims, first half of FY 2021/22 (as of end of May 2022)



Source: Authors, based on NHIF Local Branch Isiolo 2021

DISCUSSION

Despite progress made so far, the County Government of Isiolo needs to make further efforts to improve implementation of the Linda Mama program in public health facilities. Improvement measures include:

- Ensuring that all public facilities in the county are empaneled by NHIF.
- Increasing the number of health facilities that submit claims to NHIF for reimbursement of Linda Mama services rendered given that in the first half of FY 2020/21 only 24% of empaneled public facilities submitted claims.
- Encouraging facilities to reduce revenue loss by submitting claims for all Linda Mama services (i.e., deliveries, ANC and PNC services).
- Fast-tracking operationalization of the facility improvement fund legislation granting facilities financial autonomy, which was passed in early 2022 so that they retain and spend funds from NHIF reimbursements according to their needs.
- Collaborating with NHIF to continue to offer (refresher) training and support to facility staff on (1) the NHIF electronic system so that facilities submit claims and keep track of claims from filing to reimbursement, and (2) services covered by the Linda Mama scheme and their reimbursement rates.
- Continuing to improve physical infrastructure and ensure that (1) facilities have access to internet and dedicated staff to facilitate the

claims submission process, and (2) essential medicines and commodities are available in health facilities, particularly health centers and dispensaries.

- Continuing dialogue with health facilities through the monthly in-charges meetings and health care financing taskforce to identify challenges in real-time and find solutions to address them.
- Strengthening the performance monitoring process to capture targets, services provided, claims submitted to NHIF, and reimbursements made by NHIF to track Linda Mama progress implementation and to link it to broader health outcomes.

All the efforts to improve the implementation of Linda Mama program in Isiolo County allow health facilities to actively participate in the Afya Care UHC program scale-up that started in February 2022. Under the UHC program, NHIF reimburses facilities based on the services that they provide. Given that any unclaimed services result in losses because facilities still incur costs to deliver the respective services, the revenue loss needs to be reduced to improve service delivery and health outcomes in the county.

Recommended citation

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For more information, please visit our website at <https://thinkwell.global/projects/sp4phc/>.

With questions, please write to us at sp4phc@thinkwell.global.

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