World Health Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Africa**

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA   ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Seventy-first session
Virtual session, 24–26 August 2021

Provisional agenda item 18.6

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTH SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE AFRICAN REGION

Information Document

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BACKGROUND

1.   The Sixty-seventh Regional Committee adopted the Framework for health systems development towards universal health coverage (UHC) in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the African Region (AFR/RC67/10, the "framework"). It provided a list of actions that Member States should take to build their health systems towards attaining UHC. This is the first progress report on the implementation of the framework.

2.   The framework contains the following objectives: (i) to provide guidance on a comprehensive menu of health and related services which Member States should consider, to facilitate attainment of population health and well-being; (ii) to provide a comprehensive scope of health system investments that Member States can consider in line with the Sustainable Development Goals; (iii) to define measures for monitoring the performance of health systems towards better alignment with health needs.

3.   Since the adoption of the framework in 2017, progress has been made towards UHC in Member States of the Region.

PROGRESS MADE/ACTIONS TAKEN

4.   Two global reports[1,2] on the status of UHC were produced with the contribution of the WHO Secretariat in the African Region in 2017 and 2019. They provide information on areas where additional efforts are needed by countries to accelerate progress towards UHC.

5.   In line with the milestones for 2021, the following achievements were recorded:

(a)   Milestone 1: 50% of all Member States show evidence of improving population coverage of agreed standards and assessments. From the 2019 UHC global monitoring report, only 12 out of the 47 countries are above the regional median value for both the UHC service coverage index and financial risk protection.[3] Notably, 40 out of 47 (85%) Member States have evidence of improving population coverage against a target of 50%; however, seven countries have not made significant improvements.[4]

(b)   Milestone 2: 50% of Member States have evidence of improving health system performance as measured by the framework. The report on the status of health system performance (AFR/RC70/13) presented to the Seventieth Regional Committee shows that health systems performance is improving, registering 52.9% of what is feasible, compared to 49% in the 2018 State of

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1   Tracking universal health coverage: 2017 global monitoring report. World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank; 2017. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; accessed on 4 April 2021 at http://bit.ly/3alIeS6.
2   Primary health care on the road to universal health coverage: 2019 monitoring report: executive summary. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019(WHO/HIS/HGF/19.1). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; accessed 4 April 2021 at https://bit.ly/3tanF3L
3   Algeria, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa and Zimbabwe
4   Burundi, Congo, Gabon, The Gambia, Zambia, Benin and Seychelles.

Health report. In addition, 32 out of 47 (68%) Member States have demonstrated improving performance needed for movement towards UHC, exceeding the set target of 50%.[5]

(c)   Milestone 3: 80% of Member States to have started implementing the health system investment plans required for optimal performance. All Member States have initiated actions towards UHC attainment, each in a unique manner depending on its context and priorities. Currently, 19 (40%) of them have explicit UHC road maps or strategies.[6]

6.   The Regional Committee has facilitated the implementation of the framework by adopting multiple resolutions, strategies and reports.[7]

7.   The Secretariat coordinated country support through a UHC flagship programme in 19 out of 47 Member States[8] to build a common understanding of UHC adapted to each context, and identified priority actions to drive progress towards UHC.

8.   Health sector directors from all 47 Member States have met annually since 2017, to review progress made and to share lessons learnt and experiences towards achieving UHC and health-related SDG targets. The meetings have built a community of practice across the Region that is facilitating experience sharing as countries move towards UHC.

9.   The implementation of this framework has been impacted by increased demands on time, funding and capacities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the slow improvement in public health funding, delays in making operational the revitalization of primary health care[9] and limited progress with the redesigning of district health systems constitute further hindrances to delivering on UHC and other health-related SDG targets.

NEXT STEPS

10.   To accelerate the implementation of the framework taking cognizance of the effects of COVID-19,

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[5]   Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The most significant improvements are in Angola, Mozambique, Eswatini, Botswana and Uganda.

[6]   Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome et Principe, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, and Zambia.

[7]   Resolutions and reports adopted include the following:

- The Sixty-eighth Regional Committee adopted a strategy for *"Ensuring sustainable financing for universal health coverage in Africa in the midst of changing global and local economic factors"* (AFR/RC68/10)
- The Sixty-eighth Regional Committee also discussed the report on the "*State of Health in the African Region 2018"* which analysed the status of each element of the framework and made country-specific recommendations
- The Sixty-ninth Regional Committee adopted the "*Framework for provision of essential health services through strengthened district/local health systems to support universal health coverage in the context of the SGDs*" (AFR/RC69/8)
- The Seventieth Regional Committee adopted the *"Report on the performance of health systems in the WHO African Region"* (AFR/RC70/13).

[8]   These are the Member States that have had UHC scoping missions – highlighted in footnote 6.

[9]   Report of the Global Conference on Primary Health Care: from Alma-Ata towards universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 (WHO/UHC/SDS/2019.62). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; accessed 10 April 2021 at https://bit.ly/3gwLMWf.

(a)   Member States should:

   (i)   accelerate efforts to revitalize primary health care, particularly by adopting appropriate service delivery mechanisms at the district level;

   (ii)   implement targeted initiatives to improve access to essential services and enhance health system resilience, building on lessons learnt from the COVID-19 response;

   (iii) accelerate the monitoring of progress on all components of UHC at national and subnational levels;

   (iv)   accelerate sharing of experiences on the implementation of the framework across countries.

(b)   WHO and partners should:

   (i)   build on the high-level political commitment to UHC to accelerate implementation of the framework, particularly in the context of the SDG 3 Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All;

   (ii)   develop the 2022 State of Health in the African Region report, and the 2023 report on health systems performance;

   (iii) prioritize technical support for the implementation of UHC road maps which capture country priorities, for UHC attainment;

   (iv)   develop guidelines, tools and procedures to support Member States in planning and monitoring their progress in improving health systems performance.

11.   The Regional Committee is invited to note the report and endorse the proposed next steps.