Universal Health Coverage:
Briefing & Communications Guide for
African Member States In Preparation
for the UN HLM on UHC

Summary

Prepared by the Access Challenge, African Union, and Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete Foundation, this brief provides an overview of universal health coverage and the Political Declaration of the UN HLM on UHC. This brief attempts to support distinguished Head of States and Governments as they prepare for the upcoming United Nations High Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage on September 23, 2019.

What is Universal Health Coverage?

UHC means that all people, whether rich or poor, receive equal and quality access to healthcare services without suffering financial hardship.

In September 2015, as part of SDG3, all UN member states, including all African governments, have pledged their commitment to achieving UHC by 2030. UHC cuts across all health-related SDGs and brings hope of better healthcare and protection for all people, including all young people, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous people, refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants.

SDG3 and the High-Level Political Declaration on UHC reinforces the idea that every person deserves to live a healthy life. Health is a human right for all people, everywhere. Not only does UHC provide health benefits for countries, but access to health plays a significant role in increasing economic and political benefits for each nation.

UHC is not entirely new to Africa, and a number of countries have already made achieving UHC a national priority. The African Union ‘Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want’ adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in 2013, together with the Africa Union Health Strategy (2016-2030) gives a strong accent to universal health coverage in Africa. The goal of “aspiration 1” states categorically that it wishes to see “Healthy and well-nourished citizens” with strong emphasis on “expanding access to quality health care services, particularly for women and girls.” It affirms that apart from being an SDG goal, it is first and foremost the aspiration of African countries that is embodied in the vision of the Agenda 2063.

In support of the Africa Union Agenda 2063, countries have made significant commitments and strides to advance UHC within their countries. In February 2019 for example, African Heads of State and Government convened for the Africa Leadership Meeting- Investing in Health (ALM), where they endorsed the Political Declaration of The Africa Leadership Meeting called the “Addis Ababa Commitments towards Shared Responsibility and Global Solidarity for Increased Health Financing.”
The main goal of the meeting was to address the critical funding gap of UHC through increasing domestic investments in health and reorienting Africa’s health systems and health spending towards UHC in Africa.

Achieving UHC globally will depend on achieving UHC in Africa. Africa is expected to record high population growth in the medium term. With an estimated population of 1.68 billion people by 2030, Africa will be home to many of the world’s new mothers and children. Africa expects to add 170 million new children by 2030, making its under 18 population of 746 million by 2030.

High-Level Meeting on UHC - Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier World

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on September 23, 2019, the UN Secretary General will convene the first high-level meeting on universal health coverage. The UN HLM on UHC is a major opportunity to mobilize the highest level of political support for UHC, which is the cornerstone to achieving SDG3

The theme of this meeting will be: Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier World. This High Level Meeting is being convened in order to build consensus among all UN member states on universal health coverage. The main outcome of this high level meeting will be the endorsement of the Political Declaration of the UN HLM on UHC by all heads of states.

Political Declaration on UHC for High-level Meeting on UHC

The Political Declaration on UHC is a collective framework for action, which will support the global objective of achieving UHC by 2030, as part of the SDG3 and the African Union Health Strategy (2016-2030). The Political Declaration calls for all member states to lay out their UHC 2030 Action Plan. The Declaration provides flexibility for countries to choose pathways that accommodate their current realities and challenges.

This Declaration aims to garner head of state consensus and agreement on key action areas in order to make meaningful progress on UHC. This collective engagement will create a global response, ensuring heads of state and governments accelerate and scale up efforts in implementing UHC.
The main action areas include: 1. accelerate high-impact interventions; 2. health and innovative financing; 3. strengthen primary health care for UHC; 4. quality and affordable access to medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and health technologies; 5. governance and participatory approach; 6. strong health and social workforce; 7. promoting the use of technologies, innovation and data; 8. mainstreaming gender, equity, and human rights; 9. UHC in fragile situations and health security; 10. international collaboration on UHC.

Head of State participation to this year’s UN HLM on UHC is crucial because:

- Head of State action is critical to achieving UHC.
- This UN HLM provides an unusual opportunity to mobilize the highest level of political support for UHC.
- Current progress and action to achieve UHC is inadequate and increased investment, at all levels is still needed in order to meet the 2030 targets. At the current pace, one third of the global population will still lack basic access to healthcare services by 2030.

UHC is a Political Choice & Brings Political Benefits

- Countries around the world, such as Chile in South America; Turkey in Eastern Europe; Thailand and Vietnam in Asia; and Rwanda, Ghana, South Africa and Kenya in sub-saharan Africa, have demonstrated that with strong political commitment on UHC, significant achievements on UHC is possible, even in countries with low levels of national income.
- UHC generates vast political benefits because UHC reforms can deliver life-changing benefits across an entire population. Accelerating UHC will positively affect other big presidential priorities such as improved economic conditions.
- UHC drives social and economic development and plays a key role in regards to equity, social justice and inclusive economic growth. Not only does UHC deliver on the human right to health but also contributes to the broader human rights agenda.
- UHC provides an avenue to reduce malnutrition and ill health across the population, which promotes more productive lives, more jobs, higher earnings and averts high healthcare costs.
- 50 percent of the global population currently lacks access to basic health services. Over 800 million people spend at least 10 percent of their household budgets to pay for healthcare. More than 100 million of the world's population, and 11 million people in Africa alone, continues to be forced into extreme poverty because of healthcare costs. In countries such as Ghana, Thailand, Mexico, and Brazil, UHC implementation has decreased poverty levels.
- Given that 44% of the African population by 2030 will be young people, UHC re-emphasizes the importance of being able to invest in reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health to ensure adequate dedication and resource availability for this subpopulation.
About The Access Challenge

The Access Challenge is a US based non-profit advocacy organization focusing on UHC in Africa. The Access Challenge has launched The One by One: Target 2030 Campaign, which is designed, in close partnership with the AU, WHO AFRO, and special envoy Former President of Tanzania, H.E. Dr. Jakaya M. Kikwete to help drive the collaborative commitment of African governments to meaningful progress on UHC.

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Additional Resources

WHO Universal Health Coverage
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - SDG3, Good Health and Well Being
https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/

African Union Agenda 2063 | The Africa We Want
https://au.int/agenda2063

African Union Health Strategy 2016-2030

African Union Decision reference for the AHS - Assembly/AU/Dec.194(XI)
https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9558-assembly_en_30_june_1_july_2008_auc_eleventh_ordinary_session_decisions_declarations_tribute_resolution.pdf

World Bank Universal Health Coverage

Universal Health Coverage Day
http://universalhealthcovereday.org/welcome/

UHC2030 - Key Asks

Primary Health Care Performance Initiative
http://phcperformanceinitiative.org/

World Bank UNICO Studies
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/13083

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