

WORLD HEALTH DAY 7TH APRIL 2019. NEWS SUPPLEMENT

Background

Health is critical to the political, economic and social development of a country. Every April, Uganda joins the rest of the World to commemorate World Health Day and raise awareness about this critical priority across all sectors.

This year, the Global Theme is “Universal Health Coverage” and in Uganda our emphasis will be “**Multi-sectoral Action towards Universal Health Coverage**”. UHC means that all people and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. UHC is reflected in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3: “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”, and its target for UHC: “Achieve UHC, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all”.

In Uganda like many other countries, UHC can mean life or death especially for people currently without coverage; it can also mean the difference between financial survival and destitution. But for the vision of UHC to be realized, a country must draw on resources from beyond typical health sector actors to include private sector, communities, technocrats and other ministries critical to ensuring the wellbeing of a society. This includes partners in education, sanitation, infrastructure, the environment and others. For UHC to be realized, there must be space for multiple voices, opinions and strategies in the UHC discourse.

There is a long-standing consensus that the root causes of poor health and well-being cannot be solved without addressing their underlying determinants. Inadequate safe drinking water, poor sanitation and hygiene, poor non motorable road network in rural areas, weak enforcement of traffic regulations, low levels of education, poor standards of manufactured and imported manufactured goods, weak ICT infrastructure, non-connectivity of health facilities to energy sources, weak community mobilization and advocacy for healthy lifestyles, malnutrition and food insecurity are issues that trigger poor health.

Making progress toward UHC requires coordinating a careful mix of policies, funding and technical expertise that draws resources from across sectors. It also requires ensuring that the voices of those not typically included in the UHC discourse are at the table. Uniting these stakeholders to do the hard work of forging common agendas, language, visions, and solutions for UHC is critical to action: policies will sit on a shelf if those who are meant to be implementing them are not included in the design process. Ministries of health have a role to play in facilitating dialogue and supporting stakeholders as they identify questions and formulate answers in a complex environment. This includes reaching out to engage not only civil society organizations but local leadership and citizens who would otherwise be left out of the UHC conversation. These are the voices of people who have the greatest stake in UHC because they are the ultimate recipients of healthcare.

UHC and multisectoral action in Uganda

The Government of Uganda has pioneered public health policies that focus on multisectoral action as far back as the 1990s. Introduction of the Primary Health Care Grant for both public and Private-Not-For Profit Health Facilities in 1997 is one policy action that demonstrated that basic healthcare for all can be provided at a good level and at low cost if society can act together. In particular, all aspects of the health system are being strengthened by using the Primary Health Care approach with a view of shifting focus

from curative to preventive community-based care. Existing inequities in access to health care by income status, geographical location, and other factors will also be addressed through upgrading health facilities.

Multisectoral and intersectoral action is therefore critical for addressing many of today's most pressing challenges for improving health and well-being. In particular, it is necessary for Ministries of health to coordinate and collaborate in achievement of the goals and targets of UHC and of the strategic objectives of Health Sector Development Plan. It has also been recognized that there is no universal formula for attaining UHC and that each country must create its own. Government has developed a draft UHC road map for Uganda which shall guide steady movement towards UHC.

As recognized in the Health Sector Development Plan 2015 – 2020, United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and in Health 2020, engaging sectors beyond health requires new and improved approaches to governance for health and well-being. In particular, a focus on whole system approaches such as health in all policies (HiAP) and other multisectoral approaches.

These approaches not only help to address health and well-being challenges that transcend traditional sectoral boundaries but also promote good governance for health and well-being by building accountability across sectors that impact health and well-being, encouraging broader participation in the policy process, enhancing policy coherence and strengthening collaborations and partnerships to improve health and well-being.

Government has embraced Health in all policies as an approach across sectors that systematically takes into account the determinants of health and well-being, and seeks synergies, and avoids harmful health impacts in order to improve population health and health equity. It improves accountability of policymakers for health impacts at all levels of policy making in all MDAs, HDPs, PHP as we aspire for UHC. Ministry of Health is paying particular attention to areas that harness efficiency gains and will lead to improved service delivery and transformation of the country including strengthening multi-sectoral collaboration with innovative approaches across different levels of governance to address the social determinants of health e.g. safe water, education, housing, nutrition, etc. guided by the UHC Roadmap.

Overall, multisectoral action for health and well-being has the potential to provide the transformative change called for by vision 2040 and to mobilize additional resources for health and well-being. However, approaches need to be integrated into a new model of governance for health and well-being that is built around a stronger focus on partnerships, through health in all policies approach, and both horizontally across sectors and vertically through all levels of the system.

With this, multisectoral action for health and well-being can be an integral element of long-term political visions and strategies, ensuring sustainability for multisectoral approaches over time and help move Uganda towards middle income status. Multisectoral action will promote the building of a strong, accountable foundation for partnerships with all Ministries, departments and agencies, with health development partners, the private sector, civil society organizations, and ultimately, improve the wellbeing of all Ugandans that they serve.

The National commemoration of UHC day will take place on 9th April 2019 at Kira Primary School, Kira Municipality, in Wakiso District. We hope that you will join us to mark this important event.

Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng

MINISTER OF HEALTH