

Report on the dissemination of key research findings on national health insurance scheme in The Gambia

In January 2020, the Minister of Health of The Gambia introduced 'The Gambia National Health Insurance Bill, 2020' to the National Assembly. The Bill seeks to introduce a mandatory national health insurance scheme (NHIS) that would pay the cost of healthcare services for citizens and residents. Following its introduction, the National Assembly referred the Bill to three committees of the Assembly including the select committee on health to engage various stakeholders to interrogate the Bill.

The Ministries of Health and Finance and Economic Affairs- who are jointly providing stewardship over NHIS implementation constituted committees at policy and operational levels comprising various stakeholders. These committees are tasked to provide evidence to inform implementation of the scheme. Some of the evidence needed to inform decision-making include Gambian's willingness to pay for the planned NHIS and healthcare providers preference for payment system.

Our research project is exploring NHIS implementation in The Gambia in the context of universal health coverage. The main goal is to provide strong evidence to inform NHIS implementation. To make our research findings relevant considering that the Government is on the verge of implementing the scheme, we decided to share some key findings of our research with the Ministry of Health, National Assembly, and other stakeholders through a dissemination workshop.

On 6 August 2021 at the conference hall of National Association of Cooperative Credit Union of The Gambia, I presented key findings of our research to the Government of The Gambia. In attendance were policy and decision- makers, National Assembly members, development partners such as the World Bank and World Health Organization, private sector, academia, and civil society organization. Key research findings disseminated centered on two papers our project is working on:

1. Willingness to pay for NHIS in The Gambia
2. Healthcare providers preference for payment system in NHIS

At the end of my 2 hours 15 minutes power point presentation, we spent approximately 45 minutes in a question-and-answer session. Some recommendations were also given during this period. One of the recommendations from the policy makers was to conduct a quick survey among decision- makers of health facilities (chief medical director, chief executive officers and hospital administrators) who were not included in the healthcare worker survey. The rationale for this in their opinion was that the national health insurance authority will contract health facilities instead of individual healthcare workers and their preference will inform evidence- based decision making during NHIS implementation.

Despite having a huge workload with little resources to embark on another survey, I felt we must do everything possible to conduct this survey with a view to inform decision making. I am happy to report that with support from the Directorate of Health Services of the Ministry of Health, we modified the questionnaire and sent them out to the respondents.

To conclude, the dissemination forum was quite useful to our research project. Some of the recommendations proffered will make our work more meaningful to policy and law makers as the country prepares to implement NHIS. Some of the criticisms and suggestions received from researchers present will also enhance our papers better.

I will strongly recommend that PhD researchers consider disseminating key findings of their research through seminars, conferences and dissemination fora before their papers are published. Researchers should also consider informal settings such as town hall meeting, village meetings etc. when disseminating key research findings using languages that majority understand. This way, communities where data are collected are informed of key findings from these studies.

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