Reviewer's report

Title: The players and the process behind Uganda’s National Health Insurance Scheme: a case study of Uganda

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Reviewer: Irene Akua IA Agyepong

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General comments
This is a potentially interesting contribution to the policy analysis literature in sub-Saharan Africa. However the document as it stands now is strong on the descriptive, but weak on the analytic and conceptual. It needs considerable work to strengthen it conceptually and analytically – and make it clear why hearing about what has happened in Uganda holds learning points for the rest of the world and what the learning points are. Authors need to carefully re-think the conceptualization, analysis and presentation of their material as well as their conclusions and recommendations.

The authors clearly are familiar with some the theory but do not appear to be using it optimally for the wealth of descriptive material they have. They may want to consider involving someone with strong political analysis/political economy theoretical background/skills to support the further analysis, or if they already have adequate familiarity with it should consider strengthening the way they draw upon and use analytical theory and frameworks to strengthen the conceptualization and presentation

Specific comments
My impression is that this is mainly a stakeholder and contextual analysis of a policy agenda setting and policy formulation process around developing National Health Insurance in Uganda. Actual implementation is yet to start. However you have to read through several lines to deduce this. Authors should make it more clear and explicit in the introduction. It is also not clearly presented what is the aim of the analysis, and the kinds of lessons and conclusions to be drawn from the analysis for Uganda and for other countries in similar circumstances.

In my opinion as part of revision, the objective must be made much sharper/clearer. E.g. Is the aim to illustrate how stakeholders and their power and interests have shaped the process of agenda setting and policy formulation for NHIS in Uganda? It is stated that “the purpose of this paper is to highlight key policy development processes and actions taken by government during the transition period that had bearing on the current proposed NHIS design” Thus it does look like an examination stakeholder power, interests and process as well as context is being used to explain agenda setting and policy formulation processes and the outcomes. In which case the analysis and conclusions must
clearly show how this question has been answered

Similarly with the methodology – much more clarity is needed. Was this a cross sectional analysis or a retrospective analysis. What exactly does consultations with representatives of MOH mean and what kind of MOH actors were these e.g. was it group discussions, indepth interviews, informal discussions etc. Were these political actors, technical actors, at what level? Why were those particular actors chosen for interviews consultations

In describing the conceptual framework you chose to use, I do not think there is any added value in mentioning frameworks you looked at but did not chose to use. The space is perhaps better used to more clearly describe the frameworks you chose to use, how you chose to use them and why you think they are the more appropriate analytical /theoretical frameworks to help you answer the questions you raise

In presenting context, you may want to consider focusing on describing the context of Uganda that is relevant to the questions you are exploring. The comparison of the Ugandan context with other contexts could be part of the discussion section later. I think this would tighten and focus your discussion of context and also help the reader to quickly understand the Ugandan context as it is relevant to your work, before they now move on to how Uganda is similar to or different from other LMIC. It think that is part of the exploration of the relevance of the findings to other countries and context rather than part of the presentation of the context of Uganda

Currently there is a section called “financing of the NHIS” under context that describes how the NHIS is to be financed. Elsewhere in the document there is provision of information on the proposed design. This scattering of information is not helpful to the reader. There should be a section that describes clearly the current proposed reform in its entirety. I do not think this is part of context – it should be a small section on its own. It is a critical section to help the reader easily follow paper. The description should be in one place rather than scattered across the document as currently happens.

How Uganda evolved the proposed design through agenda setting and policy formulation can be presented as part of the findings and analysis of the process of agenda setting and policy formulation and the analysis of how stakeholder /actor power and interests have influenced the agenda setting and policy formulation over time; and finally led to the described results

What is the rationale /basis for dividing the process into the 3 periods used? It is not completely clear to me. The description of the phases is lengthy and the link to the analytical framework and the stakeholder analysis is not always made very clear

What proposals does the position map of stakeholders (table 3) relate to? Or have the proposals remained unchanged over the long period that this has been in the pipe line? I think a position map needs to be clearly related to a particular
set of proposals. It may also be interesting to analyse how positions have shifted over time and why, and how it has effected the final set of proposals that are going to be implemented – unless the proposals have remained unchanging over time.

The link between the conclusions and what has been presented is not always clearly drawn

Document can be considerably tightened by reducing unnecessary words and repetitions

It will be useful to explain what the authors mean by “National Health Insurance”. Also how does their concept of National Health Insurance relate to the concept of Universal Health coverage

Need to have a section that provides a clear description of the proposed reforms that are being called national health insurance. Current descriptions are inadequate and fragmented. From my understanding of the current descriptions; it would appear that it is a reform targeted at the formal sector. The source of financing is going to be mandatory deductions of employer and employee percentage of salary contributions. Plans to cover the non formal sector who are not on any payroll are not clear. It will also be important to know what percentage of Ugandans are in the formal sector and what percentage in the non formal sector. What will be the implications for the “national” nature of the reform if my understanding is correct.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests