Reviewer’s report

Title: Are our 'UHC systems' learning systems? Piloting an assessment tool and process in six African countries

Version: 0 Date: 04 Dec 2017

Reviewer: Daniel Cotlear

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper, with many virtues. It also has some important weaknesses. I discuss both below.

Positives:

This is an important initiative with lots of creative and interesting instruments.

The initial intuition is very good: UHC reforms make health systems more complex and countries need to develop a capacity to deal with the political and the technical aspects of the new complexity.

The adaptation of the tool to the UHC topic is innovative, the CoP is ideally suited for this type of work, and I think we will increasingly use tools based on a survey of expert opinion.

The paper is nicely written.

Weaknesses:

The paper reads as a report on the process followed. It could use greater development of the conceptual framework and a more detailed discussion of operational lessons learned. Below are some suggestions.

Conceptual Framework:

- Definition of a "UHC system". Is it the Ministry of Health? The health system? a certain combination of agencies that is similar across countries? The actors of a specific reform?

- Surely the learning capacity depends not only of current learning policies (eg creation of a learning budget) but also depend on an existing platform which depends partly on past policies and citizen initiatives (specifically, the learning capacity of the UHC system must depend on the size of the community of health system experts, and this is probably linked to
the number of local journals on health systems, MPH programs, and the appetite for these skills expressed as demand for analysis of these topics by governments and donors). Estimating the impact of learning policies or institutions probably needs to recognize that different countries have different initial learning platforms.

Learning from the pilot:

- I imagine that it is hard to define a "UHC system" -- what was learned from the pilot about how to refine this definition (also, the paper should explain what this means in each of the countries!)

- Scoring: I am not sure if you are trying to develop benchmarks (X should learn from Y). IF you are, is it important to ask if the difference across countries is statistically significant? Aren't you bothered by how many of the responses are very similar? Should that lead to a change in your 7 point system? Or should you drop questions that don't help you rank countries?

- Do you have a sense of how the experts can be classified as supporters or critics of the UHC reform? Wouldn't critics have a different bias than supporters? If so, should you stratify your sample to ensure that in all countries there is a similar balance between supporters and critics?

Hope this is useful!

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