

Notes for the record - Online meetings of the *UHC2030 Technical Working Group on Health Systems Assessment*

- **“The HSPA Framework and how to use it”** – 16.06.2020, 14.00-16.00 CET
- **“Case studies using the HSPA approach: A country rapid assessment and adaptation to the Covid19 response”** – 19.06.2020, 14.00-16.00 CET

Objectives of the meetings:

The main objectives of the meetings were to:

- Present the finalized conceptual HSPA framework & draft template
- Discuss how the HSPA approach can be applied in countries
- Draw on two country case studies and illustrate how the approach can incorporate resilience drawing on the response to Covid19
- Build a conceptual understanding of the HSPA framework, i.e. how health system (HS) functions are linked to intermediate and final health system goals

Introduction: Following several meetings of the UHC2030 Health Systems Assessment Technical Working Group (HSA TWG) & consultations with the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, the finalized HSPA framework & a draft template, including a demonstration of country application were presented. The online meetings were chaired by Dr. Josep Figueras, Director at the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies and by Dr. Dheepa Rajan, Health Systems Advisor at HGF, WHO.

In the first meeting: “*The HSPA Framework and how to use it*”, the finalized HSPA framework & template were presented. The second online meeting: “*Case studies using the HSPA approach: A country rapid assessment and adaptation to the Covid19 response*”, focused on the learnings from two country applications of the HSPA framework & template. A case study was also presented to showcase how the HSPA framework and approach can be used to reflect on resilience.

Review of work to date:

- The TWG started with a [review of existing HSA tools](#) and recognized their value as established approaches to collecting and analyzing data for a system-wide assessment. The group agreed not to focus on designing new tools for data collection, but to conceptualize an approach which draws on existing tools to support the assessment of health systems performance. Each tool offers a specific assessment approach and provides its own methodological angle, therefore the TWG intended to increase their overall policy relevance by creating options to link health system assessments to system performance assessments.

- The TWG further agreed to focus the HSPA approach on health system functions and sub-functions (following the World Health Report 2000), acknowledging the opportunity to focus on processes and lines of accountability within a health system. Key elements of the HSPA approach are the health system sub-functions, which reflect on key processes within each function and thus, contribute to health systems intermediate and final goals. Sub-functions, as conceptualized in the HSPA approach, are linked to specific assessment areas that help to identify if and why the function and ultimately the system performs well or not.
- The work culminated in a three-pronged approach where all elements complement each other:
 - o a *health system assessment* (HSA) or health system performance assessment (HSPA) is conducted within a country context;
 - o the *Health system performance assessment (HSPA) framework for UHC* consequently enables an understanding how the data collected and analysed for the HSA can be linked to system performance; and
 - o the *HSPA for UHC template* will support the extraction and organization of HSA data along the four HS functions and thereby distil aspects that are relevant for the assessment of health system performance.
- This two-day meeting series aimed at presenting the finalized *HSPA for UHC framework* as well as the *draft template* to the TWG group, while discussing country implications and next steps.

Key issues discussed:

The HSPA for UHC framework: Linking functions to intermediate and final health system outcomes

The *HSPA framework for UHC* shows how information gathered through existing HSAs and HSPAs can be used to assess health system performance.

The framework is structured around four health system functions – governance, financing, resource generation and service delivery – and links the performance of these functions to intermediate and final health systems goals. The framework reflects on the interconnectedness of the functions and sub-functions and thus, the performance of one function is dependent on the performance of the other functions.

The framework is built on the premise that the attainment of intermediate and final health system goals is dependent to well performing functions, hence, the performance of the function directly impacts on the performance of the system. Each of these sub-functions contain specific assessment areas to assess the performance of the function.

The framework draws on other health system frameworks (e.g. World Health Report 2000, WHO's Building Blocks). It differentiates between intermediate and final goals to understand and assess how the performance of individual functions impacts on the performance of the system.

In addition, the HSPA framework acknowledges the relevance of the wider social, economic, political and cultural context (such as macroeconomic growth, societal wellbeing, or social cohesion) for system performance.

The framework is part of the HSPA book: *World Health Organization (2021 – forthcoming). Health System Performance Assessment: A Framework for Policy Analysis. Geneva.* which offers an in-depth discussion of the four functions and the HS performance dimensions.

The common annotated HSPA template: a desk review application in two EURO countries 'Estonia and Azerbaijan'

- The *HSPA for UHC template* is a practical aid based on the HSPA framework. Using the template however is only one of various process steps needed for a full HSPA for UHC approach at country level. A desk review was undertaken by an external consultant for Estonia and Azerbaijan and was done with the sole aim to test the applicability of the HSPA for UHC template and present it to the TWG. Thus, the goals of this exercise were foremost to 1) see how far previously collected data can be used to populate the template; 2) apply and potentially provide inputs to a revision of the template; and 3) test how indicative measures in the template can be assessed.
- Estonia and Azerbaijan were presented as case studies where existing and publicly accessible data was used to populate the template. The exercise provided valuable lessons learned regarding the usefulness of publicly available data for this exercise, ease of use of the template, the use of the framework to provide a conceptual orientation for HSPA processes, and how to link available data to performance concepts.

Overall, the data collection experience in both case studies strongly highlighted that all three elements of the three-pronged approach need to be used together. Moreover, wide expert engagement on a national level for data identification, collection and interpretation is a necessity. At the same time, the *HSPA for UHC template* is a good starting point for systematizing data and ensuring that all health system performance aspects would be addressed in a comprehensive way for purposes of a broad national health system assessment.

The performance assessment as per the HSPA approach builds on already existing data, therefore one of the key benefits of the approach lies in lowering the barrier for initiating a national health system performance assessment process.

The template clearly separates between the assessment areas, which conceptually pertain to each respective sub-function and the indicative measures (e.g., indicators). The idea is for the indicators to be context specific and thus, the HSPA approach does not provide a clear recommendation for indicators.

Understanding resilience within the HSPA framework:

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted a need to better understand resilience within a health system and thus, the HSPA framework's ability to incorporate resilience into the health system performance has become even more relevant.

In regard to assessing whether a health system is resilient, analyzing the health system's ability to prepare, manage, and learn from shocks is fundamental. It is essential to assess whether the functions can maintain or even improve their performance in the face of a shock. Once one or more of the health system functions are affected by a shock, the ability of the function(s) to perform well and support the achievement of intermediate and final goals is compromised.

The group discussed how resilience can be identified within the HSPA framework.

Discussion:

Key elements of the discussion:

- **The HSPA framework itself and clarifying the links between the functions and intermediate and final health system goals.**
- **The practical use and usefulness of the framework in orienting the assessment of health systems performance, especially during challenging times such as Covid-19.**

Overall, the discussion highlighted the following aspects

- The objective of the TWG's work was not to create a new tool. It's aim was to create a comprehensive framework that would support making use of existing data and information to make the links between the performance of health system functions and the intermediate and final health system goals explicit. Hence, the intention of the HSPA 3-pronged-approach is exactly as intended: it allows policymakers, MoH officials - or simply anyone undertaking a performance assessment – to adjust the type of data needed for a full assessment to the country context by using the HSPA framework as a guidance.
- The HSPA framework's focus is health system performance assessment – both, from a quantitative as well as qualitative perspective. This mixed-method approach enables rigorous data interpretation. The assessment areas suggested within the HSPA approach encourage the contextualization of quantitative data through qualitative information.
- Referring to the country assessments presented in the meeting, it was acknowledged that the template was able to plot and organize a variety of data and information stemming from other health system assessment exercises. The template allowed the user to plot the available data along the four functions with the final aim to identify gaps in function performance.
- The TWG acknowledged the difficulties in assessing the governance function given its overarching perspective; but the TWG agreed with the proposed sub-functions and assessment areas of the governance function in the HSPA framework.
- The HSPA conceptual framework can help identify areas of weak performance in the all functions to highlight ill-preparedness for a situation of shock (e.g. an pandemic).
- The regional offices stretched their need for such a comprehensive HSPA approach and indicated their openness to support this HSPA approach within their regions. Each region has specific health system areas where a closer look would be necessary and the HSPA approach was considered flexible enough to take specific aspects into consideration depending on the country context.

- The discussions also placed on emphasis on the role of community engagement aspects within the HSPA framework. The audience recommended:
 - Demonstrate clearly that participation is part of governance and embedded within multiple sub-functions;
 - Show that accountability is part of the framework and relates to all 4 functions;
 - Participation is not limited to governance at the national level but should be ensured at all health system levels, especially the local level which is closest to the communities.

- Resilience is an important aspect with regard to health system performance. However, resilience was acknowledged as an intersectoral topic and efforts that go beyond the health system's boundaries will be essential. Additionally, the need to engage with different stakeholders (e.g., governmental and non-governmental) and across all levels of government was also considered crucial.

Next steps:

- Follow up with organizing a third online meeting which will focus on: Opportunities to build & promote a shared understanding of the HSPA approach & discuss opportunities for its countries application.
- Finalize the HSPA conceptual framework & draft template based on feedback received in the meeting;
- Finalize & launch of the HSPA book in the HSR Symposium.

List of Participants June 16th

COUNTRIES

SUMRIDDETKHAJORN, Kanitsorn

Director
Bureau of International Affairs on
Universal Health Coverage
National Health Security Office
Thailand
comments.for.kanitsorn@gmail.com

TULAY, A. Vaifee

Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health Liberia
a.vaifeetulay@yahoo.com

WENDT, David

Technical Advisor
Family Health International
dwendts@fhi360.org

TRITTER, Beth

Executive Director
PHCPI
btitter@phcperformanceinitiative.org

RATCLIFFE, Hannah

Assistant Director of Research, Primary
Health Care
PHCPI
htratcliffe@ariadnelabs.org

DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES & PARTNERS

LAKSHMI, Narasimahn Balaji

Senior Advisor, Health
UNICEF
inbalaji@unicef.org

PALU, Toomas

Co-Lead UHC2030
World Bank
tpalu@worldbank.org

PAPANICOLAS, Irini

Assistant Professor
London School of Economics
i.n.papanicolas@lse.ac.uk

MARKUNS, Jeff

Deputy Director
jmarkuns@phcperformanceinitiative.org
PHCPI

YAHYA, Ipuge

Public Health Consultant
Tanzania
yipuge@gmail.com

KASONDE, Mwenya

Consultant
HDC
kasondem@who.int

JAMES, Chris

Health Policy Analyst
OECD
james.chris@oecd.org

KARANIKOLOS, Marina

Researcher
London School of Hygiene and Tropical
Medicines
marina.karanikolos@lshtm.ac.uk

FIGUERAS, Josep

Director
European Observatory on Health
Systems and Policies
figuerasj@obs.who.int

BLANCHET, Karl

Researcher
University of Geneva
karl.blanchet@unige.ch

OMAR, Sam

Medical Officer
WHO AFRO
samo@who.int

MATARIA, Awad

Director
WHO EMRO
matariaa@who.int

ABOU TALEB, Hala

Technical Officer
WHO EMRO
aboutalebh@who.int

PASTORINO, Gabriele

Technical Advisor
WHO EURO
pastorinig@who.int

DE OLIVIERA CRUZ, Valeria

Regional Adviser
Health Financing and Governance
WHO SEARO
namgyalpe@who.int

LAI, Taavi

Health Systems Independent
Advisor
Estonia
taavi.lai@gmail.com

TALISHINSKAYA, Fidan

Public Health Officer
WHO CO Azerbaijan
talishinskayaf@who.int

WHO HQ

RAJAN, Dheepa

Health Systems Advisor
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
rajand@who.int

WHO REGIONAL/COUNTRY OFFICES

NABYONGA, Juliet

Medical Officer
WHO AFRO
nabyongaj@who.int

KOCH, Kira

Technical Officer
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
kochk@who.int

PORIGNON, Denis

Health Systems Adviser
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
porignond@who.int

O'CONNELL, Tom

Adviser
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
oconnellt@who.int

GRIEKSPOR, Andre

Senior Policy Adviser
Fragile, Crises & Vulnerable Settings
griekspoor@who.int

VENTER, Wendy

Technical Officer
Surveys, CRVS, and Health Service Data
venterw@who.int

ROHRER-HEROLD, Katja

Consultant
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
rohrek@who.int

BAJNOCZKI, Csongor

Consultant
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)

bajnoczki@who.int

BERKLEY, Shannon
 CSY Clinical Services and Systems
barkleys@who.int

UHC2030 CORE TEAM

SALLAKU, Julia
 Technical Officer
 UHC2030 Core Team
sallakuj@who.int

GREGORY, Richard
 Senior Health Advisor
 UHC2030 Core Team
gregoryr@who.int

NICOD, Marjolaine
 Development Cooperation Specialist
nicodm@who.int

Meeting Agenda

The HSPA framework and template and how to use it
 16 June 2020

Moderator: Josep Figueras

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| 14:00 – 14:10 | <p>Opening remarks:</p> <p>Marjolaine Nicod <i>(Joint Lead, UHC2030 Core Team)</i></p> |
| 14:10 – 14:20 | <p>Review of work to date, review of functions & sub-functions</p> <p>Dheepa Rajan <i>(Health System Advisor, Health System Governance and Financing Department, WHO)</i></p> |
| 14:20-14:50 | <p>Linking functions to intermediate goals and final health system outcomes</p> <p>Irini Papanicolas <i>(Associate Professor, London School of Economics)</i></p> |
| 14:50-15:00 | <p>The HSPA template</p> <p>Dheepa Rajan <i>(Health System Advisor, Health System Governance and Financing Department, WHO)</i></p> |
| 15:00-16:00 | <p>Moderated discussion: understanding the new health system performance approach</p> |

List of Participants June 19th

COUNTRIES

SUMRIDDETKAJORN, Kanitsorn

Director
Bureau of International Affairs on
Universal Health Coverage
National Health Security Office
Thailand
comments.for.kanitsorn@gmail.com

MEEUS, Pascal

Conseiller general, Service des Soins
de Sante
National Institute for Health and
Disability
Belgium
pascal.meeus@inami.fgov.be

MIHALICZA, Peter

Advisor / National Healthcare
Service Center
Hungary
peter.mihalicza@gmail.com

ALSFOOR, Dena

Ministry of Health Oman

TULAY, A. Vaifée

Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health Liberia
a.vaifeetulay@yahoo.com

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

BROUSSE, Sarah

Health Advisor
Action contre le faim
cantoine@actioncontrelafaim.org

DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES & PARTNERS

LAKSHMI, Narasimahn Balaji

Senior Advisor, Health

WENDT, David

Technical Advisor
Family Health International
dwendts@fhi360.org

TRITTER, Beth

Executive Director
PHCPI
btwitter@phcperformanceinitiative.org

RATCLIFFE, Hannah

RATCLIFFE, Hannah
Assistant Director of Research, Primary
Health Care
hratcliffe@ariadnelabs.org

PALU, Toomas

Co-Lead UHC2030
World Bank
tpalu@worldbank.org

MARKUNS, Jeff

Deputy Director
PHCPI
jmarkuns@phcperformanceinitiative.org

WARDROP, Nicola

Adviser in Nutrition and Health Services
DFID
n-wardrop@dfid.gov.uk

KASONDE, Mwenya

HDC
Consultant
HDC
kasondem@who.int

LAI, Taavi

Health Systems Independent Advisor
Estonia
taavi.lai@gmail.com

UNICEF

inbalaji@unicef.org

KARANIKOLOS, Marina

Researcher

London School of Hygiene and
Tropical Medicines

marina.karanikolos@lshtm.ac.uk

PAPANICOLAS, Irini

Assistant Professor

London School of Economics

i.n.papanicolas@lse.ac.uk

BLANCHET, Karl

Researcher

University of Geneva

karl.blanchet@unige.ch

ASGARI, Nima

Director

Asia Pacific Observatory

asgarin@who.int

YAHYA, Ipuge

Public Health Consultant

Tanzania

yipuge@gmail.com

JAMES, Chris

Health Policy Analyst

OECD

james.chris@oecd.org

FIGUERAS, Josep

Director

European Observatory on Health
Systems and Policies

figuerasj@obs.who.int

WHO REGIONAL/COUNTRY OFFICES

OMAR, Sam

Medical Officer

WHO AFRO

samo@who.int

MATARIA, Awad

TOMLINSON, Nick

Global Health Advisor

OECD

nick.tomlinson@oecd.org

BURGESS, Craig

Development Cooperation Specialist

Health Data Collaborative

cburgess@who.int

RASHIDIAN, Arash

Director of Science, Information and
Dissemination

WHO EMRO

rashidiana@who.int

COWLEY, Peter

Coordinator/Division of Health Systems
and Services

WHO WPRO

taylorm@who.int

BASCOLO, Ernesto

Advisor

Health Governance, Leadership, Policy,
and Planning

WHO PAHO

bascoloe@paho.org

PASTORINO, Gabriele

Technical Advisor

WHO EURO

pastorinig@who.int

DE OLIVIERA CRUZ, Valeria

Regional Adviser

Health Financing and Governance

WHO SEARO

namgyalpe@who.int

TALISHINSKAYA, Fidan

Public Health Officer

WHO CO Azerbaijan

NABYONGA, Juliet

Medical Officer

Director
WHO EMRO
matariaa@who.int

WHO AFRO
nabyongaj@who.int

BERKLEY, Shannon

CSY Clinical Services and Systems
barkleys@who.int

CIBULSKIS, Richard

Coordinator
Global Malaria Strategy & Agenda
Setting
cibulskisr@who.int

KOCH, Kira

Technical Officer
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
kochk@who.int

JOWETT, Matthew

Senior Policy Adviser
Fragile, Crises & Vulnerable Settings
Senior Health Financing Specialist
jowettm@who.int

O'CONNELL, Tom

Adviser
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
oconnellt@who.int

GRIEKSPOR, Andre

Senior Policy Adviser
Fragile, Crises & Vulnerable Settings
griekspoor@who.int

ROHRER-HEROLD, Katja

Consultant
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
rohreerk@who.int

BAJNOCZKI, Csongor

Consultant

WHO HQ

RAJAN, Dheepa

Health Systems Advisor
Health Systems Governance,
Policy & Aid Effectiveness (HGS)
rajand@who.int

UHC2030 CORE TEAM

GREGORY, Richard

Senior Health Advisor
UHC2030 Core Team
gregoryr@who.int

SALLAKU, Julia

Technical Officer
UHC2030 Core Team
sallakuj@who.int

Meeting Agenda:

Second online meeting: Case studies using the HSPA: A country rapid assessment, and adaptation to the Covid19 Response
19 June 2020

Moderator: Dheepa Rajan

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| 14:00 – 14:20 | <p>Applying the new HSPA approach: lessons from a desk review using country HSA data</p> <p>Taavi Lai <i>(Independent consultant)</i></p> |
| 14:20 – 14:50 | <p>Discussion</p> |
| 14:50-15:10 | <p>Resilience: What it is and what does it mean for systems performance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction <i>Josep Figueras (Director, European Observatory for Health Systems and Policies)</i> • What is Health System Resilience and how we can analyze it <i>Anna Sagan (Research Fellow, European Observatory for Health Systems and Policies)</i> • How does Resilience fit into the HSPA Framework – <i>Irini Papanicolas (Associate Professor, London School of Economics)</i> • Practical illustrations based on the COVID19 pandemic: How can Resilience be assessed in the HSPA Framework – <i>Marina Karanikolos (Research Fellow, European Observatory for Health Systems and Policies)</i> |
| 15:10-15:55 | <p>Discussion</p> |
| 15:55-16:00 | <p>Meeting wrap up</p> <p>Dheepa Rajan <i>(Health System Advisor, Health System Governance and Financing Department, WHO)</i></p> |