SHU Publication

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Improving access to quality health care through community health financing

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH COMMUNITY HEALTH INSURANCE

By Proscovia Nnamulondo and Juliet Nazibanja Kibirige

As you read this, can you imagine how many women are taking care of sick relatives both in hospitals and at home right now! What about those suffering from various illnesses!

Ill health among women and caring for sick relatives greatly hamper women's economic productivity. Apart from making most decisions regarding family health, women lose a lot of time and sometimes give up productive work, including formal employment, to take care of sick relatives.
In addition, women are also said to use more medical services than men due to their unique maternal. child and reproductive health care needs.

Through the Community Health Insurance (CHI) program, Save for Health Uganda (SHU) is working with communities to reduce the burden of caring for sick relatives.

The CHI program enables entire families to access timely and quality health care, hence reducing the frequency of illness and occurrence of health complications that often result from untreated diseases. Women living in healthy families get enough time to engage in productive activities.



A health worker from Kitagata hospital conducts a health education session in a community in Sheema district. Many women usually turn up for community based health activities.

Women participate in CHI scheme leadership

SHU organizes communities at parish level into CHI schemes through which they access health insurance. The schemes are voluntary, nonprofit, self managed and self financed.

It is a requirement in the constitutions of CHI schemes to involve women in leadership. This enables them to benefit from leadership capacity building programs. Today, women occupy 367 (46.3%) of the 811 leadership positions in schemes.

Women empowered in decision making

SHU is working with one of its partners to empower women and girls with leadership skills. A total of 97 women in Luwero and Nakaseke districts are being trained in confidence building and decision making.

Similarly, up to 2,449 girls in three parishes of Luwero district are undergoing training in CHI, advocacy, health rights and finance literacy. They are also equipped with life skills to overcome challenges.

More women access MCRH services

Over the past three years, SHU, with support from partners, has been working in Mubende and Sheema districts to improve women's access to and utilization of maternal, child and reproductive health (MCRH) services.

By December 2015, CHI schemes in Mubende district registered 70.4% completion rate of four antenatal visits, 91% institutional delivery and 28% utilization of postnatal services. In Sheema district, up to 91.8% of pregnant women completed four antenatal visits, 82.6% delivered in health facilities while 39.9% accessed family planning services.

CHI schemes made it possible for pregnant women to access the services they needed without paying cash at health facilities. In Sheema, pregnant women in four parishes automatically received health insurance cover from the premiums paid by community members who enrolled in CHI schemes. They also received free motorbike transport to and from health facilities.

Scheme members win big in general elections

By Aminah Nababi, Luwero

Twelve members of community health insurance (CHI) schemes won various elective positions in the recently concluded local government elections in the districts of Luwero, Nakaseke and Nakasongola.

Sub-county chairpersons elect are Mr Kalibbala John Paul for Luwero sub-county in Luwero district and Mr Yawe Gaster for kakooge sub-county in Nakasongola district. Mr. Bekalaze Ronald, a long time member of Kakooge CHI scheme was elected Mayor of Kakooge Town Council. Others including two women were elected as councilors to represent their areas in district and sub-county councils. Many of them have previously served as schemes leaders in various capacities and attributed their victory to the community mobilization and leadership skills they acquired from CHI schemes.

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Ishaka Adventist Hospital gets a new dental unit

By Friday Moses, Bushenyi

Ishaka Adventist Hospital (IAH) is one of the big health care facilities partnering with Save for Health Uganda (SHU) to serve members of community health insurance schemes in the greater Bushenyi area, western Uganda. Dental care services have been some of the highly demanded services by scheme beneficiaries but not provided at the facility.

The hospital recently opened a well quipped dental unit to provide services including tooth extraction, filling, scaling, polishing/cleaning, denture fixing, root canal therapy, and treatment of other minor conditions associated with the teeth. The unit also offers oral health education. It receives an average of 25 clients a month.

According to Mr. Birenge Kitokwa, the public health dentist at the hospital, the main objective of establishing the dental unit is to promote oral health, manage and treat conditions related to oral health.

Mr. Kitokwa says that awareness on oral care is being created to eliminate the misconception that the only care given to a person with a dental problem is extraction of the tooth.

Ishaka Adventist Hospital offers a wide range of general health care services to CHI schemes members in the districts of Bushenyi, Sheema and Mitooma in western Uganda.



Mr. Kitokwa attends to a client in the new dental unit at Ishaka Adventist Hospital.

CHI scheme member's corner

My name is Ruth Magambo (Mrs), a resident of Kanyogoga village, Bweyeyo parish in Luwero sub-county, Luwero district. I enrolled in *Munno mu Bulwadde* (community health insurance scheme) in 2004. Seven members of my family are currently enrolled in the scheme.

I'm proud of *Munno mu Bulwadde* because every time a member of my family falls sick, he/she accesses medical care in time. We don't worry about medical bills because we are covered up to shs 200,000 per episode of sickness.

Even when my children in boarding schools fall sick, I use my CHI health access card to take them for medical care in the health facilities contracted by my scheme. I wish everybody could enrol in a CHI scheme and enjoy the tremendous benefits.



Ruth Magambo

Reader's feedback

I have read about the latest issue of SHU publication (February 2016) in which you asked whether NRM's commitment to Health Insurance shall come to pass.

In my opinion, NRM has whatever it takes to implement and embrace the Health Insurance Program; only that it lacks the commitment to do it.
NRM has promised this for the 3rd time in a raw now; my worry is, why has it taken NRM all that long to fulfill its promise? However, given some steps taken like drafting of the bill governing social health insurance, I think this time round, it will finally come to pass.

Another reason is that many people are testifying about the health insurance program, how it has been instrumental in helping them access health services given the little earnings. And, other stakeholders like Save for Health Uganda. You have indeed opened people's eyes on the need for saving for health. A lot of people were not mindful of health; they could budget for almost everything and forget budgeting for health, given the fact that health is unpredictable. But now a lot of people have started changing their attitude towards this; they are planning for health too, which is a result of your effort.

So, given the fact that the majority of people are realizing the need for health insurance, it will be easy for the government to consider it more this time round, for the government serves the needs of its citizens. May be there is also need to involve the local leaders in this campaign. Local leaders can easily sensitize their subjects and can make them realize the need.
In the NRM Manifesto 2016-21, health services is one of the priorities, so I think it will be easy for the government to embrace health insurance, because it is on the list of things not implemented in the previous term.

Herbert Kamoga, Journalist

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