

Reflections from the REUSLTS International Conference: Investments for UHC



Participants listening to the 2018 REUSLTS conference, far right, Ms. Mary Ng'ethe, KANCO Grassroots manager

The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) agenda adopted by president Uhuru Kenyatta's government is not only a great thing for Kenya, but one worth replication across Africa. The novelty of this initiative further emerged in the recently held International Grassroots conference which KANCO attended where the International grassroots community congratulated the Kenya government for embracing UHC as one of the key pillars in the four priority pillars for the government alongside, manufacturing, affordable housing, and food security.

UHC holds the promise of delivering quality healthcare for all critical to generating economic growth through; strengthening healthcare systems to increase access to affordable, appropriate and quality healthcare as a prerequisite for long-term development and structural transformation. According to IPS, Every year, one million Kenyans are driven below the poverty line by healthcare-related expenditures. Poverty predisposes them to disease and slows all aspects of growth

in the economy and thus investment in quality affordable health care for all is urgent.

Despite the great benefits actualization of UHC present with, the challenge remains on how to package UHC for Kenyans and more so how to finance it considering the many competing government priorities as well as sustainability of the gains made along the way and grassroots advocacy is seen one of the key strategies to its realization

In Kenya, KANCO has in the last 5 years been championing the creation of a grassroots movement, of grassroots advocates, advocating for domestic resource mobilization for health. Besides trainings on engagement with elected leaders, KANCO further connects the grassroots with micro financing institutions that teaches them how to save, training them on agribusiness, microbusiness, book keeping etc towards improving their economic welfare. This way the grassroots are able to take soft loans without the hurdles of bank collateral barriers since the grassroots are mostly ordinary citizens, majority not credit worthy in effort to move them from one economic level to another. This is alongside mentorship for smart investment for health such as taking up of the National Health insurance Fund Health cover, that ensures themselves together with their families health is covered. The grassroots advocates also set aside one day in a month dubbed the 'grassroots advocacy day to take stock and track government expenditure for accountability. Over the years these actions have yielded tremendous results including increased resources for health.

Albeit in small strides, Kenya is in the right path to actualization of UHC. As the government and stakeholders lay the infrastructures, the role of grassroots becomes even more profound in ensuring accountability for resources both as provided by the constitution but also as the end consumer of these investments. It is imperative therefore that they take part in the processes, project their voices more, highlighting issues of priorities to them., through the different forums provided such as the county government budget making forums, engagements with elected leaders and leveraging on existing platforms to amplify their voice such as the media.

Reflecting on the learnings from the recently concluded REUSLTS International Conference, as a country facing many barriers to health including access to health services and affordability and as a nation striving to achieve UHC there is need for: Multi-stakeholder appreciation of the centrality of health as a key determinants of the economic and social welfare of the people thus converging around strategic investment and accountability for health and ultimately UHC. Grassroots advocacy presents an opportunity to promote investment and accountability for health however in Kenya and Africa its still nascent,. This calls for efforts to strengthen these movements and sharpening their engagement skills including preparation and execution of advocacy actions. Ownership is also critical, where every citizen in the country has an opportunity to take action and impact change through strategic engagement and organizations which will go along way in the realization of the National UHC agenda.