Managing complex systems in the public sector

Dr Flavia Senkubuge
MBChB(Pret) Mmed(Community Health) FCPHM(SA)
Specialist Public Health Medicine, University of Pretoria
Health Policy and Management
Vice-President, African Federation of Public Health Associations

SAMA Conference 2016
Universal Access to Healthcare
‘Universal health coverage is one of the most powerful social equalizers among all policy options. It is the ultimate expression of fairness. If public health has something that can help our troubled, out-of-balance world, it is this: growing evidence that well-functioning and inclusive health systems contribute to social cohesion, equity, and stability. They hold societies together and help reduce social tensions.’

Dr Margaret Chan
Director-General of the World Health Organization

Keynote address at the Ministerial Meeting on Universal Health Coverage: the Post-2015 challenge
Singapore, 10 February 2015
What we know...

**Terminology**

- Complexity - interrelationships
- Management – dealing with, or control
- Public sector – is not a stand alone but an integral part of the health system

**Health system**

- Complex
- Over the past 10-15 years, global health issues have become more prominent in all agendas
  - Rising burden of disease, Weak health systems
  - Economics, Re-emerging diseases, Violence etc

*Need for a shift in health reforms*
‘The shift’

- Complexity of health system reforms, demands a paradigm shift from efficiency-directed reforms of the 1990’s to:
  - people centered
  - resilient
  - a more coherent approach to change that includes:
    - a deeper understanding of the contexts of reforms;
    - understanding how the health system operates;
    - need for information for decision making;
    - institutions issues.\(^1\),\(^5\),\(^8\)
Current vs systems thinking

• The WHO health systems-framework: service delivery, health workforce, health information, medical technologies, including medical products, vaccines and other technologies; health financing; leadership and governance.\textsuperscript{9,10}

• Systems thinking:
  • deeper understanding of the linkages, inter-relationships, interactions and behaviours among elements that characterize the entire system.\textsuperscript{9,14,}

• There is a need to shift focus to the nature of the relationships among the building blocks; the spaces between the building blocks; and the synergies emerging from interactions among the blocks.\textsuperscript{9,13}
Shit focus to....Framework
The facts are...

Complex health challenges

• Around three quarters of the world’s absolute poor live in middle-income countries and many of the world’s poorest people will remain dependent on external financial and technical support.

• South Africa’s poor depend on the public sector to provide health services
Public sector challenges (1)

**Health service delivery**

- service access and coverage;
  - focus on strengthening health systems has a positive effect on access and uptake of some services
- equity in services;
  - inequality in access and coverage continue to plague many countries.
- service quality;
  - pressure to meet numerical targets may have a detrimental effect on the quality of services
Public sector challenges (2)

**Poverty**

- The top 10% of South Africans earn 58% of the total annual national income, whereas the bottom 70% combined earn a mere 17%.

- Health is then affected predominantly by basic requirements of life e

**Disease burden**

- Quadruple burden
  - Especially HIV/AIDS, NCDs, TB, maternal and child mortality
Public sector challenges (3)

Governance and leadership
Public sector challenges (4)

**Human resources for health**

- HRH are the foundation of the health care system.
- The health workforce “works in ways that are responsive, fair, and efficient to achieve the best health outcomes possible, given available resources and circumstances”.
- Interaction between health sector reforms and three key factors that indicate the expected performance of health workforce function of the health system, namely: production; distribution; and retention of health workers.
Public sector challenges (5)

Health information system

• Well-functioning health information systems will provide better understanding of the interaction of public sector and country health systems.

• Three key factors that indicate performance of health information system, namely: availability and accuracy of the system; use and demand of information; and innovation.
Public sector challenges (6)

Supply chain management system

• According to WHO, “a well-functioning health system ensures equitable access to essential medical products, vaccines, and technologies of assured quality, safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness, and their scientifically sound and cost-effective use”. ⁹

• Uninterrupted supplies of essential health commodities and technologies are necessary.

• Two key factors for the management of supply chain system, namely: procurement and distribution; and quality.
All in all...

• Health is a social construct, influenced by broader political and economic forces, generating public value and contributing to societal development

• Exist within a context and history

Complicated or complex?

Complexity vs agency?
Therefore...

• Perhaps it’s not about how we manage complex systems in the public sector

• But rather

  • How we ensure that the public sector responds to the needs of the population in a complex system
  • How we ensure: quality, affordable health care for our populations
In order for public sector to respond & manage (1)

• Governments need to instill health systems agenda to respond to both diseases-specific and population-based interventions;

• There is a need to develop a comprehensive policy package for public sector reform;

• There is a need to improve alignment of planning and coordination process between health systems and public sector;
In order for public sector to respond & manage (2)

- Need to generate and use reliable data for strengthening health systems and public sector;
- Engage “street-level” policy implementers in design of new interventions for the public sector;
- Strengthen governance and leadership; and
- Allow a holistic and developmental approach
- We need to bring communities with us, making sure no one is left behind
Recognise that....

• Public sector reforms cannot be developed from a single global or regional policy formula. Any reform will depend on the country’s history, values and culture and the population expectations.

• The process of reform for the public sector needs a fundamental rather than merely an incremental and evolutionary change. Without radical structural and systemic changes, existing governance structures and management systems will continue to fail to address the existing health problems.
Conclusion
References


Thank you

flavia.senkubuge@up.ac.za