

# From Commitment to Implementation: Accelerating Progress on Universal Health Coverage in Africa

**CPHIA 2023 Side Event Report**



27 November 2023

Radisson Blu, Lusaka, Zambia

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## Introduction

This is a report for a Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA) side event meeting held under the theme “**From Commitment to Implementation: Accelerating Progress on Universal Health Coverage in Africa**” that took place on 27 November 2023 at Radisson Blu in Lusaka, Zambia. The meeting was organised by the Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (CSEM) for UHC2030 in collaboration with The Youth Platform, the Community Initiative For TB, HIV/AIDS & Malaria (CITAM+) and WACI Health to bring together stakeholders to exchange ideas on the way forward for implementing the political commitments on universal health coverage UHC.

## Background

The Conference on Public Health in Africa comes at a critical moment in the road towards achieving UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Universal health coverage means that everyone, everywhere can access inclusive, quality health services without financial hardship. According to the 2023 Global Monitoring Report published by the WHO and the World Bank biannually, progress on UHC has stalled and reversed in some countries, with 4.5 billion people still lacking access to essential health services and 2 billion facing financial hardship to access them. To put progress on UHC back on track, countries must double their efforts to address critical barriers that prevent their citizens, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable groups from accessing health services they need.

The year 2023 provides a unique opportunity for governments and other stakeholders to begin to take necessary steps to accelerate progress on UHC. At the United Nations High-level Meeting (HLM) on UHC in September 2023 world leaders renewed their commitment to accelerate progress towards achieving UHC and the SDGs by 2030. But questions remain on what steps governments will take to translate commitments into concrete actions that expand coverage and ensure equity. Continuing with business as usual is not an option.

From decision makers to affected communities, everyone has a role to play in addressing the gaps in access to health services. This side session brought together stakeholders from across the continent for thought provoking discussions on how

they will work together to translate HLM commitments into concrete actions at the country level to increase access to essential health services and protection of vulnerable populations. The session highlighted opportunities for stakeholders to engage and mobilize political momentum on UHC, including the upcoming UHC Day on 12 December 2023.

## Event objectives

The specific objectives of the event were to:

1. Foster a shared understanding of the HLM commitments and explore entry points for African countries to implement them to accelerate progress on UHC and the SDGs.
2. Discuss the role of parliamentarians to accelerate the implementation of UHC commitments.
3. Explore successful strategies and lessons learned on the continent or elsewhere that can be instructive in the region.
4. Encourage all stakeholders including regional bodies, civil society, community organizations and others to support the implementation of UHC commitments in countries.
5. Share resources and opportunities for stakeholders to advance the UHC agenda and hold their governments accountable.

## Opening remarks

The event commenced with remarks from Mr. Sibu Malambo, Executive Director, The Youth Platform, who highlighted that African countries had, over the past two decades, made advancements towards achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). In 2001, during a meeting in Abuja, African nations committed to allocating a minimum of 15% of their annual budget to sustainable health financing. Mr. Malambo further noted that progress had been notably sluggish, as evidenced by the State of UHC in Africa report, revealing that less than 50% of people in Africa, particularly women, girls, and other vulnerable groups, can access the healthcare services they require. He emphasized that millions of Africans face financial hardships due to out-of-pocket healthcare service costs. He indicated that the timing of the conference (CPHIA) is significant, occurring three months after the High-Level Meeting on UHC in September 2023, which resulted in a comprehensive and ambitious political declaration on UHC, aligning with the midway point to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Mr. Malambo expressed the need for discussing and aligning advocacy plans and actions moving forward. He urged everyone, including policymakers, decision-makers, civil society organizations (CSOs), youth advocates, and key stakeholders present, to contribute in finding ways to expedite actions toward meeting UHC targets.

## Welcoming remarks—Dr Matilda Simpungwe, Assistant Director Adolescent Health, Zambia Ministry of Health



Dr. Matilda Simpungwe, extended her gratitude to the parliamentarians, delegates, and young individuals in attendance, extending a warm welcome on behalf of the Zambia



Ministry of Health. She expressed appreciation to all delegates and specifically welcomed the young participants, emphasizing the collective commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Dr. Simpungwe acknowledged the diverse efforts from various sectors contributing to the goals and underscored the crucial roles of young people and civil society organizations. She emphasized the ongoing importance of guaranteeing accountability processes, raising young people's voices, and providing platforms for their continued participation. Dr. Simpungwe eagerly anticipated gaining further insights and valuable perspectives from all participants.

## Panel discussion: Translating UHC commitments at the country level to address health inequities

### Introduction

Rosemary Mburu, Executive Director at WACI Health, assumed the role of moderator for the event's panel discussion. She mentioned that the event is about a conversation on how to



Figure 1: Panelists during the discussion

foster a shared understanding of the HLM commitments and explore entry points for African countries to implement them to accelerate progress on UHC and the SDGs. Rosemary highlighted that during the UN General Assembly's High-Level Meeting (HLM) on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in September 2023, countries, including Zambia, made substantial commitments:

- Discuss the role of parliamentarians to accelerate the implementation of UHC commitments.
- Explore successful strategies and lessons learned on the continent or elsewhere that can be instructive in the region.

- Encourage all stakeholders including regional bodies, civil society, community organizations and others to support the implementation of UHC commitments in countries.
- Share resources and opportunities for stakeholders to advance the UHC agenda and hold their governments accountable.

After sharing the objectives, she introduced the panellists, providing a brief overview of their backgrounds, and warmly welcomed them to the stage. The distinguished panel included:

1. Dr. Justin Koonin, President, ACON, and Co-Chair UHC 2030
2. Lucas Zulu, Policy and Planning, Zambia Ministry of Health
3. Honourable Dr. Christopher Kalila Kalila, Member of Parliament Zambia
4. Noah Elias Tegene, Principal Technical Officer, Africa CDC
5. Johnpaul Omollo, Africa Regional Lead for R&D Policy and Advocacy, PATH
6. Chilufya Hampongo, Program Officer, Treatment Advocacy and Literacy Campaign (TALC)
7. Selam Bekele, Health Financing Expert, IGHIP

### Panel Discussion

The moderator, Rosemary Mburu, initiated the panel discussion by asking Chilufya Hampongo about what UHC meant for a young woman. Hampongo emphasized that UHC is not merely the absence of illness but entails full access to comprehensive healthcare, transitioning from commitment to action. He stressed the importance of enabling women to actively participate in their healthcare journey.

Selam Bekele was then asked about her reflections on UHC. Bekele emphasized the need to address community needs, especially for the most vulnerable populations. She drew attention to successful strategies, citing Japan's post-World War 2 achievement of UHC by targeting diseases affecting the most vulnerable. Bekele advocated for a comprehensive approach, discussing diseases that disproportionately impact vulnerable groups.

Justin Koonin discussed the challenges of realizing UHC from a global perspective. He highlighted the recent High-Level Meeting (HLM) on UHC in New York,

emphasizing the need to translate international discussions into impactful actions on the ground. Koonin stressed the importance of interpreting global agreements using local experiences for effective country-level implementation.

Lucas Zulu, offering reflections on making UHC a reality in Zambia, outlined the government's perspective on UHC. He discussed the four dimensions: access, equity, cost-effectiveness, and quality. Zulu highlighted Zambia's mission to deliver equitable and cost-effective health services, ensuring that no one is left behind. He mentioned progress in financial allocation and emphasized the government's commitment to providing more resources to health services.

Dr. Hon. Kalila, representing the policy-making perspective as a Member of Parliament (MP), outlined the role of MPs in elevating UHC as a national priority. He emphasized the need for policies that ensure equitable access to quality healthcare and advocated for the rights-based approach to health. Kalila discussed legislative efforts, including the enactment of the National Health Insurance (NHI) law, and highlighted the role of parliamentary caucuses in holding the government accountable.

Noah Elias Tegene, speaking from a regional perspective, addressed challenges related to UHC, focusing on delivery of health products and services, people's need, and infrastructure. He stressed the need for local production of health products, a strong health workforce, and improved infrastructure. Tegene emphasized the importance of breaking barriers and repositioning Africa to address these challenges.

Johnpaul Omollo, representing Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), discussed the role of CSOs in advancing UHC. He emphasized the need for a clear framework or roadmap for UHC, the importance of balancing political and technical spaces, and the role of CSOs in developing shadow reports. Omollo highlighted the significance of strategic purchasing and efficient resource utilization, advocating for a tax-based approach to health insurance for sustainability.



The panel discussion provided diverse perspectives on UHC, ranging from individual experiences to global challenges, emphasizing the collaborative efforts needed to achieve equitable access to quality healthcare.

### Q&A session with the audience

Eger Kapembwa, a youth representative from The Youth Platform, raised a crucial question regarding the progressive realization of health and human rights within the context of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). He highlighted the gap between enacting laws and their effective implementation and inquired about the role of Members of Parliament (MPs) in shifting cultural attitudes to strike a balance between culture and providing health to people. Dr. Kalila responded by emphasizing the significance of health in national development plans and key strategies. He explained the process of translating legislation into action through the National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP) from 2022-2026. The plan outlines priorities and strategies to strengthen health systems for effective implementation. Dr. Kalila also stressed the importance of respecting health and human rights without stigma or discrimination.

Johnpaul Omollo-Paul echoed the need for a sustainable plan, indicating that Africa is transitioning from local production to local supply security. Africa CDC is spearheading efforts to lead countries toward sustainable production through local manufacturing for supply security. In response to Eger's question about the Ministry of Health's initiatives for persons with disabilities (PWDs) to ensure UHC, Lucas Zulu mentioned the establishment of youth-friendly corners to address cultural issues on the ground.

Ruth Mahone expressed concern about Africa's dependence on imported health products and inquired about strategies for local production. Dr. Kalila responded by acknowledging Africa's high import rate and outlined initiatives to promote local manufacturing. He mentioned the launch of a steering committee, supported by the EU, to encourage local production, with visible progress expected in 3-4 years. Lucas Zulu added that incentives for producers and awareness of other countries' capabilities contribute to managing manufacturing costs on the continent.

Justin Koonin highlighted the need for African solutions for UHC. He cited Thailand as an example and highlighted the importance of political, technical, and societal commitments. Koonin introduced the Future of the World initiative on UHC day, emphasizing the coordination of multilaterals and the crucial role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in institutionalising social participation at the national level. He acknowledged that cultural issues and human rights, depending on the context, can impact the progress and achievement of UHC and must be acknowledged to concretely implement change at the country level, including in the hope of a future adoption of aWHA board resolution on the social participation agenda.

## Conclusion

The event concluded with closing remarks delivered by Lucas Zulu, Selam Bekele, and Chilufya Hampongo. During the concluding statements, Justin Koonin, the co-chair of the UHC 2030 agenda, officially transferred the Action Agenda from the UHC Movement to Noah Elias Tegene, the representative of Africa CDC.



## Lucas Zulu

During the meeting's conclusion, Lucas emphasized that social participation serves as a facilitator for engagement and a consultative process. For instance, in the development of the essential services package, Zambia ministry of health ensured the inclusion of everyone in shaping the benefit package. He highlighted that the government is dedicated to ensuring ongoing broad consultations in the journey to establish crucial enablers of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

### **Selam Bekele**

Selam highlighted that the UHC High-Level Meeting (HLM) has generated substantial commitments, including political pledges with active involvement from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). While there are promising efforts, the realization of these commitments is contingent on matching resources. In the current post-COVID era, marked by economic and conflict challenges, meeting these commitments requires substantial financing. Selam emphasized the necessity of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to financing, incorporating innovation in manufacturing and production. Drawing inspiration from successful models in other countries, such as Indonesia, she stressed the crucial role of a robust CSO movement for these initiatives to coalesce effectively.

### **Chilufya Hampongo**

Chilufya stressed that the discussion on domestic resources is paramount; without adequate funding, achieving the 2030 targets remains a distant dream. It is imperative to engage policymakers and clearly articulate strategies for allocating resources to address the diverse needs of all citizens. Allocating funds strategically to address specific needs is crucial. Inclusive decision-making processes involving policymakers should be implemented, with the active participation of young people in developing and executing strategies. Recognizing the vital role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), she emphasized their unique perspective, living the challenges on a day-to-day basis.

## Resources shared

### [The Action Agenda from the UHC Movement](#)

The Action Agenda from the UHC movement is a set of action-oriented policy recommendations that country leaders should implement to strengthen resilient and equitable health systems, advance universal health coverage and health security, and deliver health for all by 2030. The UHC Action Agenda was developed by an inclusive, multi-stakeholder Task Force, which brings together twenty representatives from UHC2030 constituencies and beyond. It was informed by a public consultation which gathered 830 responses from over 100 countries. It was endorsed by the UHC2030 Steering Committee. [Learn more.](#)

### [The 2023 Political Declaration on UHC: CSEM comprehensive analysis and briefing note](#)

As part of the High-level Meeting (HLM) on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) follow-up, the CSEM created and shared advocacy tools related to the outcomes of the 2023 Political Declaration on UHC to empower CSOs in driving the implementation of the HLM commitments in countries and hold governments accountable. [Find more here.](#)

## Annex:

### Agenda

Minutes	Agenda	Presenter
10'	Opening and short introduction  Provide an overview of the state of the play on UHC in Africa and the significance of the HLM commitments	Sibu Malambo, Executive Director, The Youth platform
15'	Opening remarks- MoH Zambia	Dr Matilda Simpungwe, Assistant Director Adolescent Health, Zambia Ministry of Health
35	<p><u>Panel discussions:</u> Translating UHC commitments at the country level to address health inequities</p> <p><u>Proposed question for all panelists:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Across the continent, too many people don't have access to essential health services they need - what are the meaningful steps that governments should take to expand service coverage?</li> </ul> <p><u>Proposed questions for MoH:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What concrete steps will your government take to implement the political declaration on UHC?</li> <li>• What obstacles do you foresee?</li> </ul> <p><u>Proposed MP questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the role of Members of Parliament in advancing health equity to ensure everyone can access health care?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Moderator:</b> Rosemary Mburu, Executive Director, WACI Health</p> <p><b>Panelists:</b></p> <p>Dr Justin Koonin, President, ACON, and Co-Chair UHC 2030</p> <p>Lucas Zulu, Policy and Planning, Zambia Ministry of Health</p> <p>Honourable Dr. Christopher Kalila, Member of Parliament Zambia</p> <p>Noah Elias Tegene, Principal Technical Officer, Africa CDC</p> <p>Johnpaul Omollo, Africa Regional Lead for R&amp;D Policy and Advocacy, PATH</p> <p>Chilufya Hampongo, Program Officer, Treatment Advocacy and Literacy Campaign (TALC)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What initiatives have parliaments in the region taken to implement UHC and the SDGs and what are the challenges they face in the process?</li> <li>• What is needed for parliamentary action to accelerate progress to achieve on UHC and the SDGs by 2030?</li> </ul> <p><u>Proposed question for AU/ Africa CDC:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the top challenges that governments in Africa face in expanding access to essential health services and what roles can the African Union/ Africa CDC play to help countries close those gaps?</li> <li>• Are there successful strategies and lessons learned on the continent or else where that can be instructive in the region in terms of increasing service coverage and financial protection?</li> </ul> <p><u>Proposed questions for civil society</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role can civil society play to help countries address critical gaps in UHC implementation and what are the opportunities?</li> <li>• What are the immediate opportunities for stakeholders to mobilize around to push for action on HLM commitments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o flag UHC day, resolution on social participation etc</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Selam Bekele, Health Financing Expert, IGHIP</p>
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10'	Q&A	All
5'	Closing and reflections	Rosemary Mburu, Executive Director, The Youth platform