

# A Comment on Universal Healthcare in Africa

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## Short Communication

Achieving highest attainable standard of mental and physical health is a universal goal. Many countries around the world consider good health as a characteristic of a democratic system. Through accepting African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 1981, African countries agreed to realize people's fundamental rights including right to health. African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights have had a respectable record in remedying cases of violation of right to health and promotion of this right [1]. There is considerable diversity among African countries, but still they face common challenges in improving health of their population and providing access to healthcare. They mostly committed to providing universal health care in their national constitutions. However, the progress to translate such commitment to good quality health services which are affordable and accessible to all is not satisfactory. Major challenges of the health system of these countries are high level of child and maternal mortality and malnutrition. In addition, these systems are not prepared to control epidemics and growing burden of chronic diseases [2].

Achieving universal healthcare for all needs investment in health facilities and appropriate resources management. Health systems of African countries are often short of resources. Many of them have health insurance schemes that offer special protection measures for poor population, children, pregnant women and indigenous people. However, the sustainability of insurance and health systems is in danger, because most of African countries are ranked among poor counties and poor people lack the recourses to pay for health services and health insurance premium. Moreover, many of current health insurance programs do not provide a universal coverage and for example, they cover governmental workers and their family members. Majority of Africans work in informal sector, do not have a fixed income and cannot afford the insurance premium [3]. The health system of these countries is depended to foreign financial aid. Such aid has had a considerable effect on improving main health indicators such as life expectancy in Africa. However, being dependent to foreign aid can be a threat health system because provision of the aid is tied to the policies of donor countries. In many cases international aid is devoted to the priorities defined by donor countries that might not be the priorities defined by the receiver country. Moreover, the budget for a special program might be cut by the change of the policies of the donors. On the other hand, there are criticisms about effective use of donated resources by the local governments. It is suggested that instead of providing direct financial aid such as cash payment to individuals or for use of special services, the recourses are devoted to programs for empowerment of communities and health systems. People, who are empowered and have information about preserving their health, know how to plant their food and make a living will need less support in future.

Since, many determinants of health are outside of health sector, above all, poor African countries should be helped in order to have economic progress and remove poverty. Financial foreign aid should be based on initiatives for development of the receiving country and its health systems. The proverb "Give a Man a Fish, and You Feed Him for a Day. Teach a Man to Fish, and You Feed Him for a Lifetime" fits this suggestion well.

## References

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