



Role of G20 in Reducing Health Inequalities Through the Provision of Public Healthcare Services by Enhancing the Capacity of Local Government Institutions

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Solidarity for the
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Abstract

The increasing risk of infectious disease outbreaks and the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases, coupled with socioeconomic disparities in healthcare access, present a significant challenge for global public health systems. While many regions excel in basic health indicators, the rising rates of chronic diseases highlight the need for proactive measures. Strengthening primary healthcare services through decentralised governance can address these issues, although implementation poses certain challenges. Empowering local governments with greater responsibilities and funding can be an effective way to improve healthcare, especially in times of health crisis. This policy brief emphasises the importance of collaborative governance, where different levels of government and international agencies unite to improve public health services. It offers strategic pathways for strengthening collaborative governance, encouraging G20 and G7 nations through T20 to establish a global governance framework that supports effective healthcare delivery. This collaborative approach can lead to innovative solutions and better health outcomes for communities worldwide.

Keywords: G20, Health Inequalities, Public Health Services, Local Governmental Institutions

Diagnosis

The Challenges & the G20's Role

In recent years, health inequalities in accessing public health services have intensified globally across numerous regions, driven by various socioeconomic determinants.¹ While many regions perform well in addressing basic health indicators, health systems often struggle with rising morbidity from chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and stroke, particularly among older age groups. Private healthcare often dominates, but it remains inaccessible to the poor, pushing them further into poverty due to rising out-of-pocket expenses. These costs and healthcare access disparities become even more pronounced during health crises. Thus, we see a global need for stronger institutional frameworks in public health, including decentralised local governance. Public health institutions and NGOs can play a more significant role when externalities are present, due to which markets often fail.²

Decentralising health services by strengthening primary healthcare services has been a challenge in several countries, requiring a systematic framework for effective implementation. The systems approach is often used to analyse complex systems involving several stakeholders (Figure 1).³

¹Leonard, Kenneth L. "When both states and markets fail: asymmetric information and the role of NGOs in African health care." *International Review of law and Economics* 22, no. 1 (2002): 61-80.

² World Health Organization. "World Bank and WHO: Half the world lacks access to essential health services, 100 million still pushed into extreme poverty because of health expenses." *Press Release* 13 (2017).

³ Parbery-Clark, Charlotte, Lorraine McSweeney, Joanne Lally, and Sarah Sowden. "How can health systems approach reducing health inequalities? An in-depth qualitative case study in the UK." *BMC Public Health* 24, no. 1 (2024): 2168.

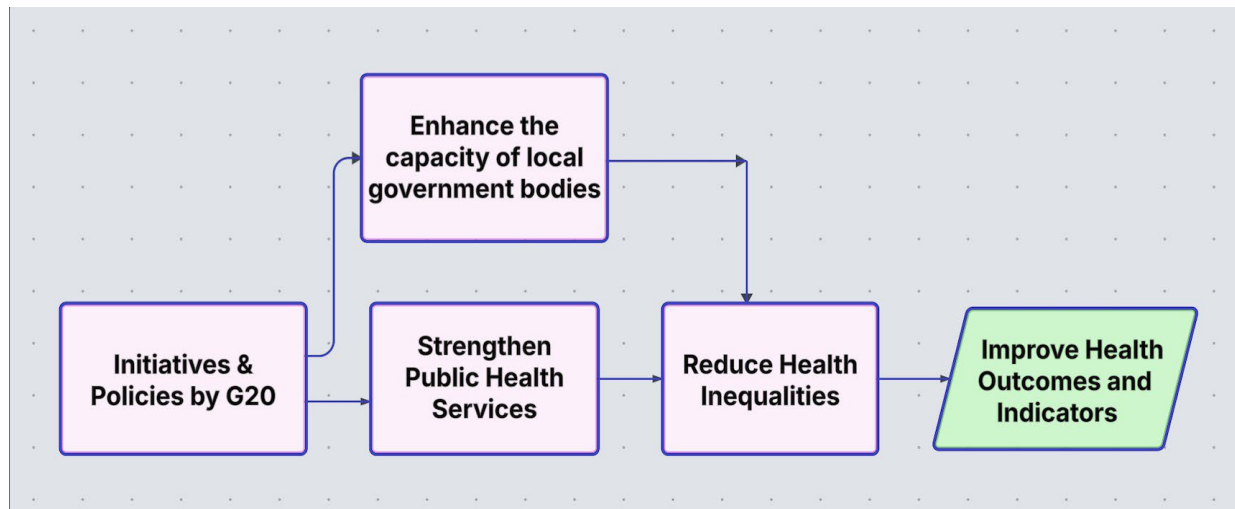


Figure 1: A systems flowchart on how policy actions of G20 can improve health outcomes in countries through collaborative governance (Source: Authors' Own)

By carrying forward the health agendas of the previous G20 Presidencies (Germany in 2017, Indonesia in 2022, India in 2023, and Brazil in 2024), South Africa's G20 Presidency focuses on equity and universal accessibility of health services. Through the current G20 presidency, an international framework can be built to address this global challenge of rising health inequalities by providing public health services in countries and by strengthening the capacity of local government institutions. This will also help in building strong and integrated health systems in several countries. Collaboration between the various stakeholders involved in the provision of public health services has to be strong to strengthen the global health structure. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also pointed out that local governments and healthcare workers should work in tandem with one another, with the support of political agencies involved in their respective countries.⁴

⁴ World Health Organization. "The role of local government in health: comparative experiences and major issues." In *The Role of local government in health: comparative experiences and major issues*. 1997.

The global emphasis on primary healthcare, driven by Universal Health Coverage, stems from the realisation that relying solely on tertiary and secondary care increases pressure on health infrastructure, especially during emergencies.⁵ Primary healthcare centres can help manage sudden surges in demand, but in many regions, local governments are limited to providing only basic services, which can be inefficient in crises. Greater devolution of responsibilities and funding to local bodies is essential for improving health services. Thus, there's a need for collaborative governance (agencies at different tiers of governance working in tandem with one another) in providing health services in a world that has been witnessing several health shocks in recent years (Figure 2).

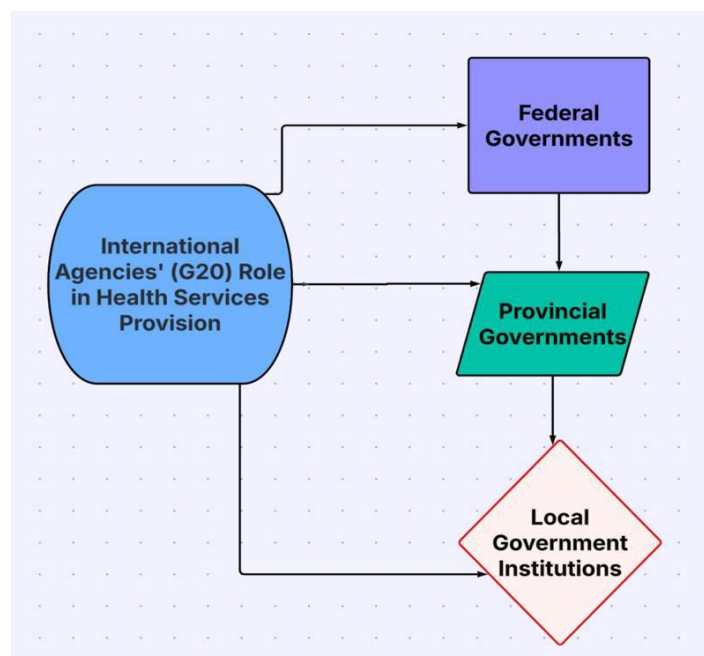


Figure 2: Political agencies involved in health governance and policy-making (Source: Authors' Own)

⁵ Liwanag, Harvy Joy, Zaida Orth, Rashi Agrawal, Pragati Hebbar, Manusmriti Agarwal, Annika Frahsa, Oria James, Sophie Sidonie Meyer, and Ananya Rao. "Transforming Health Systems Towards Holistic Outcomes in the G20 and Beyond." (2023).

Recommendations

The G20, as an intergovernmental forum, holds immense potential to positively influence global governance and health policies. It can globally shape transformative health policies and foster sustainable, accessible, and high-quality healthcare systems. By establishing strategic priorities, mobilising financial and technical resources, strengthening local governance, and facilitating international collaboration, G20 can significantly enhance public health infrastructure worldwide. This approach empowers local governments to improve healthcare service delivery and helps to utilise G20's diplomatic influence and resource allocation capabilities. Also, G20 can actively support the achievement of the third Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations, which focuses on the overall health and wellbeing of the global population. By guiding governments in bolstering the capacity of their local governments, the G20 can play a pivotal role in ensuring that healthcare services are effectively delivered to all. This can pave the way for a healthier, more resilient global community.

1. Promote Decentralisation, Delegation, and Devolution of Funds and Functionaries at Local Levels in Health Governance

G20 should express their support for greater decentralisation, delegation, and devolution of funds and functionaries for local governments in healthcare governance. This is especially needed during health emergencies.⁶ Supporting greater fiscal devolution can help local governments to access funds more easily. G20 can establish a working group which focuses on global health. This group can have short-term targets for countries to strengthen their health systems through greater decentralisation at local levels in health governance. This is

⁶ Bari, M. Ehteshamul, and Pritam Dey. "Local governance in india during a pandemic: a case for granting agency to municipal governments." In *International Handbook of Disaster Research*, pp. 1-19. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2022.

crucial for ensuring Universal Health Coverage in countries where it's achievable only by strengthening the Primary Healthcare centres at local levels. G20 can also develop a Decentralised Health Governance Index to monitor the extent of decentralisation in healthcare systems and assess its impact on health outcomes.

2. Help in Building the Capacity of Local Government Institutions

Capacity building of local government officials and healthcare workers in both rural and urban regions of a country is crucial as it forms a strong foundation for a strong healthcare system. G20 should play an active role in facilitating capacity-building activities for different stakeholders involved in the provision of healthcare services at local levels by collaborating and consulting with different tiers of government of a country. It can organise knowledge-sharing programmes and workshops to improve patient-centred care, deliver quality and inclusive health services and properly implement health policies at the grassroots level. G20 can connect global experts with local officials and health workers to train them on health budgeting, surveillance of diseases and community engagement, especially during health disasters.

Through these capacity-building exercises, G20 can promote gender-sensitive and inclusive health approaches, which can help reduce health inequalities across different populations. By training these stakeholders, G20 can engage the local communities in the decision-making process on healthcare-related issues, which will strengthen them and help them become more resilient to health shocks in the future. Capacity building and training exercises can prevent adverse impacts of socioeconomic and even political changes, such as political transitions in a country.

In the era of advancing AI, G20 nations should accelerate digital healthcare innovations, particularly at the local level. Diagnostics using AI is a powerful tool,

especially in detecting several non-communicable diseases like Glaucoma, cancer and others at an early stage. The promotion of telemedicine among developing and less developed countries is essential. Regions that are geographically hard to access can benefit from these advancements in healthcare. This aligns with the Universal Health Coverage target focused by the G20 presidencies (India, Brazil, and South Africa). G20 can organise workshops on the effective utilisation of AI in governance and on the surveillance of diseases. This can reduce inefficiencies in healthcare systems and improve health resource allocation globally.

3. Provide Technical and Financial Help

G20 countries can play a pivotal role in helping developing and low-income countries strengthen their health systems by providing them with financial and technical support, especially at the local level. The G20 can explore complementary and innovative funding mechanisms in response to the evolving challenges facing multilateralism and international cooperation amid rising geopolitical tensions. In this context, the G20 should collaborate with international organisations such as the WHO, UN, IMF, and World Bank to offer both technical support and financial assistance to increase local governments' capacity to deliver healthcare services. Through such joint efforts, they can support the strengthening of primary healthcare infrastructure at the local level.

For this, a special fund could be created by the G20. It can be used to facilitate the functioning of mobile health units and primary healthcare infrastructure that function at the local level. This is crucial to improve access to health services, especially in rural areas. Local governments can also use this fund to purchase medical equipment, vaccines, and essential medicines, which are crucial for effective service delivery. Furthermore, the fund can be used for public health awareness in local communities, focusing on non-communicable diseases such

as rare diseases, glaucoma, and genetic disorders, ensuring their early detection. The G20 countries should also support NGOs and public-private partnerships (PPPs) to attract investments in local health systems in areas where governments lack resources.

4. Facilitate Health Policy Reforms

The implementation of health policies in a country can weaken due to the lack of coordination between the different tiers of government. G20 can play a significant role in this by guiding health officials and health workers who work at the local levels. This can be done by conducting workshops where case studies of different regions are presented and discussed. G20 can also support the evaluation and monitoring of the health reforms to ensure their effectiveness.

T20 South Africa Convenors



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