

Private Sector Engagement in Healthcare Delivery in Developing Countries: A Review

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Abstract

Objective: Private sector engagement is crucial for the success of health programs, as it brings in additional resources, expertise, and innovation. The main objective of this review is to understand private sector engagement in healthcare delivery

Methodology: A descriptive case study design using an analytical framework was used. Literature from well-researched articles was reviewed. Only articles written in English language between 2012-2022 were considered if they talked about private sector engagement in health delivery. The strategy and procedure involved searching for articles using scholarly search engines, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and Semantic Scholar.

Results: Findings demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by healthcare delivery in developing countries, which included 58.2% of private sector involvement by the government, 34.29% inadequate human resources, 30% inadequate budgetary allocation, and 8.45% bordering on meagre leadership and management. Employing various private sector engagement could provide resources required for strengthened health systems. During COVID-19 pandemic, it was established that four contextual factors were very critical in dealing with the pandemic. Individual features, economic crises, a weak health system, and a multi-sectoral response to COVID-19, were the main important factors established. Other contextual factors that impact the success of private sector involvement included human resource management, financial capacity, and multi-sectoral response to the pandemic

Conclusion: The private sector plays a critical role in supporting provision of healthcare but is mostly recognized only during health disasters like COVID-19 Pandemic. Challenges faced by healthcare can be addressed when steps to involve the private sector are deliberately made to garner support for provision of healthcare through Private Sector Engagement initiatives for the sustainability of health programs.

Keywords: Private Sector Engagement, Public-Private Partnership, Healthcare Delivery, COVID-19, Developing Countries.

Introduction

Private sector engagement can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of health programs. With the many challenges faced by healthcare delivery in developing countries, private sector involvement can result in positive effect if this engagement with the health sector is harnessed properly. The aim of this review was to examine articles on private sector engagement in healthcare delivery in developing countries. In this review, the focus was to bring out information on the challenges faced by healthcare delivery, types, contextual factors, and challenges and solutions related to private sector engagement

in the delivery of healthcare services. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, respective governments in developing countries were seen to collaborate with the private sector in combating the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has put an enormous strain on public health resources and overwhelmed health systems in countries worldwide.¹ This was an ongoing global health crisis caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus² (SARS-CoV-2) and was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.² As a result of this pandemic, the health systems were in distress, and support from the private sector was inevitable. Therefore, lessons can be drawn from how nations managed to deal with the pandemic with involvement of the private sector.

The "private sector" refers to the part of the economy that is owned, managed, and operated by private individuals, companies, or organizations rather than being controlled by the government.³ Health equity framework is based on three core principles: prioritizing equity in health outcomes, acknowledging the diverse and interconnected factors that affect health, and adopting a historical and lifelong perspective. Health equity framework further states that health outcomes are shaped by the complex interactions between individuals and their environments.⁴ Therefore, the private sector could be one important support for health programmes through effective engagement.

Private sector engagement in health programmes refers to the involvement of private businesses, organizations, multinational corporations, private firms, and individuals in activities related to the improvement and delivery of healthcare services.⁵ It also involves public-private partnerships. A public-private partnership is a venture that involves collaboration between at least two partners from the public and private sectors.⁶ Developing countries encounter challenges related to low budgetary allocation to the health sector, thereby negatively affecting the provision of health services. Inadequate workforce and budget, and poor leadership and management remain the main challenges faced by the health sector,⁷ which has contributed to

weak health systems. Therefore, the health sector needs to find alternative funding through private sector engagement. This was demonstrated during the public-private collaboration in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. Most governments partnered with different organizations, including the private sector, to deal with the pandemic. It is critical to understand how these governments manage to engage the private sector to effectively combat COVID-19. Few studies have been conducted to understand the role played by the private sector in tackling this pandemic. However, there is still a knowledge gap on lessons learnt and how this can be endured for sustainability of healthcare service delivery.

Healthcare has been mainly provided by the public sector; however, private sector continues to play a significant role of supplementing government efforts in ensuring quality health services are provided. To ensure quality and sustainability of healthcare provision, private sector's involvement remains critical. In developing countries, health systems remain extremely weak due to over dependence on donor funding which keeps reducing annually. Additionally, inadequate health budget allocation by respective governments has worsened the situation, resulting in weak and challenged health systems. Therefore, private sector involvement is very critical as it has been seen to bring in critical resources which can strengthen healthcare systems. To what extent has private sector played this role of bringing in additional resources for improving quality healthcare? Studies have shown that private sector played a significant role during COVID-19 pandemic but there is still inadequate information concerning aspects of private sector engagement.

The objective of this research was to review literature on private sector engagement in health service delivery during COVID-19 pandemic and draw lessons for policy and future research. What types of private sector engagement, contextual factors, challenges, and potential solutions could affect healthcare delivery in developing countries? This review aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the private sector engages in healthcare delivery. This study is significant as it brings important information on the various types of private sector engagement, contextual factors, challenges, and potential solutions, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from this review will contribute to the body of knowledge and will further interest scholars, policy makers, decision makers and researchers on ways in which health systems could be strengthened through private sector engagement. In addition, the review will establish areas that require further research to enhance private sector engagement for sustainability of healthcare service delivery.

Methodology

A comprehensive method following PRISMA guidelines was utilized to gather data from articles on private sector engagement-related health programmes. The study employed a descriptive case study approach with an analytical framework that enabled the analysis of data. The study only included articles written between 2012 and 2022. Only articles written in English language and having full text were considered if they talked about private sector engagement in health delivery. Any

articles written before 2012 and after 2022 and were not written in English language, or did not contain the whole text and only abstract were excluded from this review.

The strategy and procedure involved searching for articles using scholarly search engines, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and Semantic Scholar. Search terms were first created by employing open search methods to ascertain the possible range of literature and to experiment with different keywords. Key words included 'Private Sector Engagement', 'Public-Private Partnership', 'Healthcare Delivery', 'COVID-19', and 'Developing Countries'. Out of 60 peer reviewed articles found eligible through search engines, only 20 were included, which focused on key challenges faced by the health sector, types of private sector engagement, contextual factors, challenges, and solutions pertaining to the response to COVID-19.

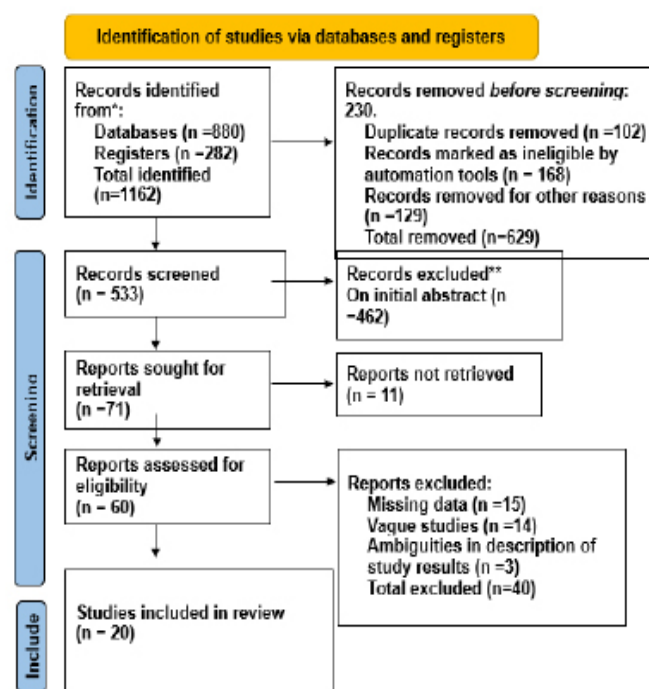


Figure 1: PRISMA Diagram Showing the Study Selection Procedure for investigating the role of Private Sector in healthcare delivery.

Data collection involved review of articles written on private sector engagement in health delivery with a focus on types, contextual factors, challenges, and solutions. This involved a review of studies conducted with the goal of reconciling conflicting research findings and identifying gaps and areas that require future studies.⁸ Most of the articles reviewed highlighted private sector involvement during COVID-19 and had personal biases based on the researcher's area of interest.

Data analysis involved the process of organizing the codes into themes during thematic analysis. Data collation entailed gathering the data and sorting it into appropriate subgroups. The support arising from private sector engagement from different countries were analyzed and changes based on different factors were discussed. Also, other studies relating to private sector en-

agement contextual factors, models, challenges and solutions of private sector engagement and their effect on healthcare were analyzed and discussed.

Results

Table 1 showing Summary of Results from different articles reviewed.

Types of Public Contextual Factors	Challenges Facing the Health Sector	Engagement of Private Sector	Solutions of Private Sector Engagement
Private	1. 34.29% inadequate human resources	1. Public-private partnership	1. Features
	2. 30% inadequate budgetary allocation	2. Budgetary allocation	2. Budgetary allocation
	3. 27.26% others-budget allocation	3. Weak health system	3. Sector-wide approach
Individual			
	1. Education	2. Marketing	4. Management
	2. 8.45% bordering on meagre leadership	3. Human resources	5. Vouchers
	and management	4. Financial resources	6. Contracting out
Social			
	1. Economic crises	4. Multi-sectoral response	7. Dual practice regulation
	2. Weak health system	5. Public-private mix	8. Financial government support
		6. Capacity building and training	9. Technology systems
		7. Advocacy to ensure political will and commitment	
	4. 58.2% of private sector involvement		

Key Challenges and Solutions Facing the Health Sector

The health sector faces several key challenges that have significant implications for healthcare delivery, public health, and overall well-being. From the literature reviewed, the main challenges faced by the health sector were (34.29%) inadequate human resources, (30%) inadequate budgetary allocation, and (8.45%) bordering on meagre leadership and management while the remaining (27.26%) covered others and solutions included

increasing budget allocation, capacity building and training, and advocacy to ensure political will and commitment.⁷ These results mirror the six building blocks for a strong and effective healthcare system by WHO.

Other studies pointed out the similar challenges faced by health sector and the need for private sector engagement as a way forward. The challenges included poor expenditure, inadequate budgetary allocation, and a lack of health financing policy as the main challenges, and the solution required private sector participation.⁹ Private sector involvement by the government was inadequate and went on to suggest that the private sector should be involved in policy formulation so that they could leverage their financial resources to provide free or subsidised treatment to patients.¹⁰ Other studies revealed that the private sector remains an important partner in providing resources that enhance healthcare. The private sector was not only the provider of financial resources but could contribute positively to development by bringing on board leadership skills necessary for sustainable development.¹¹ The use of PSEs can provide financial support as the private sector remains a key stakeholder in the provision of health care services.¹²

Types of Public-Private Engagement

The reviewed pointed out eight types of private sector engagement utilised in southern Africa, which included public-private partnership, social marketing, a sector-wide approach, the public-private mix, vouchers, contracting out, dual practise regulation, and financial support.¹³ These approaches are commonly employed in various sectors to improve service delivery, public health, and development outcomes. Social marketing was the most popular PPEs used in southern African countries.¹³

Studies demonstrate that stakeholder engagement has positive effects on scale-up in HIV/AIDS service delivery.¹⁴ However, it is worth noting that organisational characteristics and capacities, strong interpersonal relationships built on trust, mutual respect, and effective communication, and the chosen PPP model that should align with the specific needs and challenges of the context in which it operates remain crucial factors.¹³ Addressing these factors thoughtfully and proactively can significantly improve the chances of success for public-private partnership initiatives in various contexts, including those in southern Africa.

Contextual Factors of Private Sector Engagement

One of the reports outlined four contextual factors, which are individual features, economic crisis, a weak health system, and a multi-sectoral response to COVID-19; these were the four main important factors established.¹⁵ Other contextual factors that impact the success of private sector involvement include human resource management, financial capacity, and sanctions imposed by the state.¹⁶ The study mentioned some of the wealthiest individuals in Africa, like Aliko Dangote, as having contributed huge sums of money, about \$5 million US dollars, in the fight against COVID-19, motivated by selflessness and a desire to help others without any expectation of personal gain or bene-

fit.¹⁵ Another prominent factor observed is weak health systems. Nigeria has been ranked by the WHO as number 163 out of 191 countries according to their health system report of November 2021 because the country has weak health.¹⁷

Studies reviewed showed that most projects had challenges providing primary health care through PPPs when they started and during the implementation stages. To overcome these challenges, the study recommended solutions related to education, management, human resources, financial resources, information, and technology systems.¹² The private sector played a critical role in increasing awareness of health education and promotion, which subsequently led to an increase in prevention and treatment services.

Challenges and Solutions of PSE

Education, management, human resources, financial resources, information, and technology systems remain the main challenges during the start-up and implementation periods of health care programs and digital tools remain the main solution.¹² The study conducted across the 4 nations (Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Uganda) between November 2020 and March 2021 established that private sector involvement strengthened laboratory and surveillance systems, COVID-19 case identification and management, sensitization, and health service delivery continuously.¹⁸ Implementation of PSE increased access to and provision of treatment and prevention services in India and several African countries though studies on PPP was not included.¹²

Discussion

An analysis of the key challenges faced by the health sector in developing countries is mainly bordering on lack of financial resources and the private sector can be the solution through private sector engagement platform. This is because private sector engagement could provide the much-needed financial resources to support the health sector. Studies have shown that private sector involvement has been critical in the provision of health care, directly or indirectly through the manufacturing of materials and the supply of technology important in enhancing health programmes.⁴ Moreover, the private sector plays a significant role in various aspects of education, including health education and promotion.

The private sector should be regarded as a key partner in the provision of health services because articles on the COVID-19 fight have demonstrated that they can provide the needed financial resources for combating health challenges. It was established that implementation of PSE increased access and provision of treatment and prevention services in India and several African countries.¹² Businesses and other private entities provided financial resources which increased uptake of healthcare. This is a clear demonstration that private sector engagement can provide not only resources but also increase uptake of services. Private sector engagement can take various forms, depending on the nature of the collaboration and the specific objectives of the involved parties. Each of these types of private sector engagement

brings unique advantages and challenges. Governments and organizations in southern Africa and other developing countries may use a combination of these approaches to address various developmental issues and improve the well-being of their populations.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a prominent model for private sector engagement, where collaborations between public and private entities combine resources, expertise, and accountability to deliver public services and infrastructure projects.¹⁹ The need for improved health systems including infrastructure is critical for the health sector. Furthermore, financial support from the private sector can come in various forms, such as donations, grants, or investments in development projects. Social marketing, which was reported to be most popular involves using marketing techniques to promote social and behavioral change.¹³ In the context of southern Africa, this approach may be used to encourage positive health behaviors. PPP allows the government to leverage private sector expertise and resources to improve service delivery.²⁰

Each of these types of private sector engagement brings unique advantages and challenges. Governments and organizations in southern Africa may use a combination of these approaches to address various developmental issues and improve the well-being of their populations. Therefore, there is a need to create a platform where the private sector can be engaged on a regular basis for the sustainability of healthcare delivery.

Contextual factors play a significant role in private sector engagement, especially when it comes to facilitating the mobilization of resources for various initiatives. These factors create an enabling environment that encourages private sector entities to invest, participate, and contribute to projects and programs. It is worth noting that philanthropic efforts from individuals and companies, as observed during the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria, provided additional resources for healthcare facilities, research institutions, and humanitarian organisations responding to the crisis.¹⁵ Furthermore, most developing countries have weak health systems. The weaknesses in healthcare systems highlighted the importance of private sector engagement in filling resource gaps, expanding healthcare provision.

From the studies reviewed, it can be argued that private sector engagement can be beneficial to supporting the health systems in majority of countries globally. The private sector contributed to the COVID-19 response through engagement in surveillance and testing, management of cases, and health promotion to maintain health access.¹⁷ Collaborations between the private and public sectors can bring together their respective strengths and resources, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions to address pressing national challenges. Having a streamlined pathway to facilitate private sector engagement with the public sector for national causes is critical.¹⁰ From various research articles, it emerged that private sector engagement is very critical for improving health outcomes and sustaining business production. The financial support provided to the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria resulted in the halting of tragic deaths of employees and businesses.¹⁵ It also prevented loss of productivity by ensuring

the preclusion of the spread of COVID-19 infections through adherence to the golden rules set up and implemented by both the private and public sectors through this partnership.

Overall, the public-private collaborations during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of a coordinated and inclusive approach to tackling global health challenges. By leveraging the strengths of each sector and working together, governments, private entities, and civil society organizations were better equipped to respond effectively to the pandemic's impact on health, the economy, and society.

Conclusion

The private sector plays a critical role in supporting provision of healthcare but is mostly recognized during health disasters like COVID-19 Pandemic. Challenges faced by healthcare can be addressed when deliberate steps to involve the private sector are made deliberately to garner support for provision of healthcare through PSE initiatives for the sustainability of health programs. Through active and enhanced private sector engagement, healthcare delivery and systems would be strengthened as established by various articles written on the response of private sector during COVID-19.

Limitations

This review was constrained by time. The three months allocated was not enough to conduct an extensive review of articles. In addition, this study relied on desk review of articles on PSE in the healthcare delivery conducted between 2012- 2023 from developing countries of Africa and Asia and did not include other studies done under other disciplines or sectors. The study only utilized articles written in English language. Examining a wide range of written articles and consulting key opinion leaders on the subject matter would have provided a broader understanding into this topic under review.

Recommendations

There is a need for further studies on what factors could motivate effective private sector engagement for the sustainability of health programs. Further, there is a need for further studies to look at the effects of private sector engagement on healthcare delivery in developing countries, considering factors such as access to services, quality of care, cost-effectiveness, and patient outcomes.

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