

Strengthening Civil Society Capacity for Universal Health Coverage: Lessons Learned from Togo

Authors

Seyni Mbaye¹, Gwladys H. Agbofoun, Aboubakar Issa, Lior Miller¹, Kéfilath Bello, Jean-Paul Dossou
¹ Results for Development, CERRHUD

CONTEXT

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) has become a key goal for many countries, including Togo, aiming to ensure equitable access to quality health services for all. Togo has undertaken several initiatives to strengthen its health system and expand social health protection, such as establishing the National Health Insurance Institute in 2011 and launching programs like "School Assur" in 2017 and "WEZOU" in 2021. In 2020, a co-creation process involving various stakeholders identified key challenges and developed an action plan to achieve UHC, emphasizing civil society's role. The Accelerator project worked with UONGTO and INSP!R Togo to enhance civil society organization (CSO) capacities for UHC.

OBJECTIVES

This poster examines the outcomes from the Accelerator's work to strengthen CSO participation in the UHC process in Togo. It highlights the progress made, the challenges encountered, and the lessons learned for better civil society involvement in achieving UHC goals.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

In Togo, the Accelerator collaborated with CSO umbrella organizations (UONGTO and INSP!R Togo) to strengthen civil society involvement in UHC, co-creating a capacity-building plan in 2021. This included training on UHC concepts, resource mobilization, social accountability, and continuous coaching. The acquired skills were applied in advocacy, community dialogues, and policy development, with ongoing learning and a sustainability plan developed in 2023.

LEARNINGS

Civil Society Awareness of Their Role in UHC

Government and civil society stakeholders report that the Accelerator project's capacity-building has significantly impacted CSOs' role in achieving UHC in Togo. CSOs are now more actively engaged in advocacy, policy monitoring, and collaboration with health authorities, enhancing public health debate and inclusive policymaking. Health authorities also note improved relations and collaboration with CSOs, reflecting a collective awareness of the importance of multisectoral engagement for UHC progress.

CSO's Mastery of Key UHC Concepts

Accelerator training has greatly enhanced Togolese CSOs' technical capacities, improving their communication with health authorities. This has facilitated smoother information exchange and proactive involvement in national UHC initiatives, including policy development and advocacy. CSOs have applied these skills to strengthen UHC advocacy, effectively engaging health authorities to develop policies that address community needs, thereby enhancing their communication skills and influence in health policymaking.

Increased Accountability for Health

Accelerator training has increased CSOs' awareness of social accountability in policy and budget monitoring. CSOs now understand and fulfill their role in ensuring the effective implementation of health policies and programs. They act as watchdogs to hold health authorities accountable to beneficiaries. Health authorities observe proactive engagement from CSOs, demonstrating their active oversight in citizen involvement.

Financial Independence for UHC Initiatives

Accelerator training has strengthened CSOs' project writing and budgeting skills, enabling effective project formulation and financial management. CSOs have learned to establish strategic funding partnerships and explore innovative financial mobilization methods, enhancing their financial autonomy.

Enhanced Community Dialogue and Advocacy Skills

Capacity-building has enabled CSOs to develop and implement community projects. Examples include APRODIFE and MUSATRAV, which conducted community dialogues and awareness campaigns on UHC. Many other CSOs have submitted project proposals to donors.

Evolving Perception of Civil Society

Local UHC actors acknowledge CSOs' broader role in UHC, encompassing social, economic, and political dimensions. CSOs are recognized as crucial in reaching population segments beyond government reach, leveraging their community proximity for mobilization and awareness. This new perception positions CSOs as active participants and beneficiaries in UHC, crucial for promoting inclusive health policies. The increased recognition of CSOs marks a significant shift in health partnerships in Togo, acknowledging their expertise and commitment as vital to UHC's success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Enhancing awareness and adoption of universal health insurance (UHI):** The government needs CSO support to implement UHI effectively. CSOs should intensify awareness efforts using culturally and socio-economically appropriate approaches. Targeted information campaigns, community sensitization sessions, and partnerships with local media can effectively encourage UHI adoption.
- 2. Promoting financial participation in UHC:** CSOs should educate the population on the importance of financially contributing to UHC, addressing the low insurance culture in Togo. Educational programs on the benefits of health coverage and accessible financing mechanisms should be developed and disseminated nationwide.
- 3. Improving collaboration with the Ministry of Health:** CSOs should enhance their collaboration with the Ministry of Health by establishing formal communication and coordination mechanisms, such as regular meetings to share activity reports, align on action plans, and discuss national health priorities.
- 4. Developing communication skills:** CSOs should invest in improving their members' communication skills to ensure more effective and engaging awareness campaigns. This could involve training on communication techniques, including the use of social media and visual communication tools.
- 5. Acquiring deeper evaluation skills:** Given their role in public oversight, CSOs should develop evaluation skills to assess healthcare quality and monitor the impact of their interventions. This could include training on health service quality assessment methods and using performance indicators to measure progress.
- 6. Planning for sustainability:** CSOs should develop strategic plans to ensure the sustainability of their UHC efforts. This could involve building long-term partnerships with donors, government institutions, and other stakeholders, as well as diversifying funding sources to ensure the long-term viability of their initiatives.