

UHC 2030 Technical Working Group on Health Systems Assessments

REVIEW OF HEALTH SYSTEM ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND APPROACHES

KATJA ROHRER-HEROLD

17.10.2017

RATIONALE OF THE REVIEW

The aims of the UHC 2030 TWG on Health System Assessments:

1. recommend options for conducting a more harmonized and aligned Health System Assessment, with practical guidance on the optimal country-led and country-tailored process
2. recommend a common, adaptable annotated framework for health systems performance assessment

The review aims to support objective #1 of the TWG tasks, which is to:

- **Examine all relevant, existing tools and approaches on health systems assessments;**
- **Examine potential entry points for harmonization by distilling its pros and cons;**
- Come to a consensus on how to better align the different approaches
- Agree on what should be a HSA in the SDG era, with a view to what is needed to progress towards UHC including clear linkages to on-going work such as UHC assessments;
- Agree upon principles and main approaches for a country-led process, given the differing needs of those conducting the assessments, as well as the objective of lowering transaction costs from a MoH/government perspective.

STRUCTURE OF THE REVIEW

1. Criteria for **selection of tools**; methodology guiding the **document review** of the selected HSA tools and **key informant interviews**
2. Descriptive **overview of the selected tools**, including key **commonalities and differences**, drawn from the tool's documentation and complemented by key informant interview information
3. Comparative **analysis** of the different tools
4. Proposition of relevant **characteristics** for both a **sound assessment tool** as well as for a **sound assessment process**
5. Discussion of **potential entry points for harmonization** and alignment in regard to the
 - a) **Technical content** as well as
 - b) **HSA process** of tool application
6. **Additional elements** to expand the work on HSAs

1. HEALTH SYSTEM ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Name of the tool	Run by	Year
Health System Assessment Approach: A How-To Manual	USAID	2016
Health System Performance Assessment	WHO /EURO	2012
Health System Analysis for better Health System Strengthening	World Bank	2011
Monitoring the Building Blocks of Health Systems: a Handbook of Indicators and their Measurement Strategies	WHO	2010
Health System Rapid Diagnostic Tool	FHI 360	2011
Situation Analysis of the Health Sector	WHO	2016
Health System Reviews (HiTs)	WHO / EURO	2010

2. METHODOLOGY

AREA REVIEWED	GUIDING QUESTIONS
1. HSA tools' stated purpose and intention	What are the objectives of the tool? How is the HSA structured? What is the main target audience?
2. HSA tools' scope	Which areas are covered under the HSA? Which approach is used to cover those areas? What level of assessment is offered?
3. Adaptability of the HSA	Can the tool be (easily) adapted to the country-specific context? Is the tool relevant and acceptable to stakeholders? Can the tool (easily) be adapted to stakeholder's general and/or specific objectives?
4. Current use of the HSA	Who is using the tool? Why are stakeholders using the tool? How are the results of the assessment used?
5. Comparative advantages of the HSA tools	What are the distinctive elements of the tool that make it unique or essential?

3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED TOOLS

3.1. HSA tools' stated purpose and intention

3.2. HSA tools' scope

3.3. Adaptability of the HSA

3.4. Current use of the HSA

3.5. Comparative advantages of the HSA tools

3.1. HSA TOOLS' STATED PURPOSE AND INTENTION

- Main objectives: **to assess and diagnose** the strengths and weaknesses of the health system
- Difference in regard to **underlying intentions** and more **specific objectives** of each tool:
 - Support the **identification of solutions** and provision of recommendations for implementation
 - **Descriptive** diagnostic
- Structuring elements of assessment process - number of **similar steps** for assessing the health system, but:
 - **Different levels** of detail on each step
 - Emphasis on **flexibility**
- **National** level vs **sub-national** level
- **Target audience:** government (MOH) and international partners

3.2. HSA TOOLS' SCOPE

- The areas covered are reflecting all or parts of:
 - the **health system building blocks**
 - established **health system goals**
 - established **health system functions**
- **Single** approach vs **mixing** approaches
- **Indicator use:** no common set of indicators, no clarity on the definitions of different terms and indicators used across the tools
- Developing **recommendations** vs **descriptive** diagnostic
- **Strategic** focus vs **operational** focus

3.3. ADAPTABILITY OF THE HSA TOOLS

- High degree of flexibility and adaptability to **national and subnational** contexts
- Adaptability to **stakeholder priorities**
- Adaptability to **objectives of assessment** (system vs component / building block)
- **No concrete guidance** on “how to adapt”

3.4. CURRENT USE OF THE HSA TOOLS

APPLICATION OF THE REVIEWED TOOLS IN COUNTRIES:

- Development of national plans / strategies and funding applications
- Stakeholder participation
- Decision for or against a HSA approach seems to be the funding landscape and presence of the tool owner – political decision
- Difficult to track and trace use (and usefulness)

COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE ON HSA TOOL APPLICATION:

- Lack of formal assessment design
- Partial use of tools
- Relevance for TWG

3.5. COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE OF THE HSA TOOLS

- The most explicit and detailed tools focus on two components of the assessment: **methodological guidance plus technical guidance**
- Other tools provide a brief **overview of how to approach** an assessment (or an indicator framework), without actually providing technical or methodological guidance
- Tools specialize in regard to the aim of the assessment:
 - **descriptive** overview of the health system
 - **recommendations** and options for (e.g.) reform implementation

3.6. CONCLUSION

Broad consent in regard to aims, focus and methodological aspects; all tools able to thoroughly support the assessment of the health system; differences “diluted” by the adaptability and flexibility all tools emphasise.

→ Finding options for harmonization and alignment:

- 1) **readiness of stakeholders** to engage in joint assessment efforts
- 2) leeway to base their strategical and operational support on **sustainable and robust assessment results**

→ Relevant areas for continuing the work on increasing comparability for improved harmonization and alignment:

- 1) the **political willingness of national and international partners** to contribute to alignment and harmonization efforts
- 2) **quality of the results** established through the assessment

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUND HSA TOOLS AND PROCESSES

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SOUND HSA TOOL

- Clear **definitions** and clear understanding of indicators
- Establishing methods for **reducing complexities**
- Understanding **relationships between technical areas** / inclusion of the political level to be able to get to the root causes and identify causal pathways

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SOUND HSA PROCESS

- “Being prepared” **before** the HSA process even starts
- No “**one-off**” exercise
- **Expert-led facilitation** necessary
- Selection of **key stakeholders** crucial
- Establishing systems for **follow-up**

5. POSSIBLE AREAS FOR HARMONIZATION AND ALIGNMENT TO INCREASE COMPARABILITY

Potential entry points for harmonization and alignment presented in this review are related to:

- a) Increasing synchronization of processes and results: ways for increasing the **validity and reliability** of the assessment result - technical aspects
- b) political aspects of harmonization and alignment: promoting a more **accountable HSA environment** - political aspects

A) OPTIONS FOR HARMONIZATION: TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Joint framework for presentation of results to overcome challenge to compare assessment results across tools - Initial ideas to improve comparability:

- A joint framework **reflecting results of all types of HSAs**, e.g. descriptive as well as prescriptive/action oriented approaches, quantitative as well as qualitative aspects,...
- Framework to serve as a **platform to present the evidence** that would link up to the developed recommendations for implementation
- Reflection of results could be designed in a “**levelled approach**”, where results are arranged according to their analytical detail and complementing results could be included later on.
- Framework could serve as a **consistent point of reference** for each individual country, across different points in time and for comparison between countries; Information could be “stored” and accessible for future reference and use

A) OPTIONS FOR HARMONIZATION: TECHNICAL ASPECTS *cont.*

IMPROVED HANDLING OF INDICATORS:

- **Joint approach** to indicator use
 - 1) Increasing **clarity** on indicator use
 - 2) Identification of a **common core set** of indicators
- More emphasis on **consistency of data** could increase validity for comparison
- Clear and consistent **terminology**
- Health Data Collaborative as a key partner?

A) OPTIONS FOR HARMONIZATION: TECHNICAL ASPECTS *cont.*

- **Tracking and tracing** use and usefulness: creating options for monitoring and evaluating the use of the tool
- **Transparent weighing of components** could increase reliability for comparison: clarity on relative importance that is given to the components assessed
- Improved ways **to access existing (national) data** and assessment results:
 - Increasing the awareness of stakeholders of already existing data sources / assessment results: avoiding duplications.
 - Use of existing data for “new” assessments to develop recommendation
 - A (common) data platform where assessment reports are filed

A) OPTIONS FOR HARMONIZATION: TECHNICAL ASPECTS *cont.*

- **Common weighing of socioeconomic, nutritional and environmental factors** could increase comparability
- Common aspects of **sustainability** could reduce burden on countries:
 - Establishing processes for follow-up action and ensuring a good use of the assessment and its results, e.g. maintaining access to results by national and international stakeholders
- Provide **guidance on selecting a HSA tools**: Joint knowledge base on existing and relevant HSA tools to enable better guidance for countries to select the most appropriate tool for their needs

B) OPTIONS FOR HARMONIZATION: POLITICAL ASPECTS

- Increasing the **relevance of HSAs** to different stakeholders and recognizing the strategic importance HSAs
- **Lowering transactions costs** to the country
- Increasing the **willingness of stakeholders** to identify options
- Understanding the **boundaries** for harmonization and alignment

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR UHC2030 TWG ON HSAS

- **More focus on “users”:**
 - research use and perception of tools by country stakeholders
 - gauge needs / expectations of the countries
- **Include “reality-check”:** how are assessments conducted in countries?
- Clarify role of “**deep-dive**” tools
- Clarify role of **private sector**

Roundtable Discussions

-
- ❖ A JOINT FRAMEWORK FOR PRESENTATION OF RESULTS
 - ❖ IMPROVED HANDLING OF INDICATORS
 - ❖ ROLE OF DEEP DIVE TOOLS
 - ❖ COMMON UNDERSTANDING ON HSA FOLLOW-UP AND USE OF RESULTS

❖ A JOINT FRAMEWORK FOR PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

A **joint format for presentation** of results to increase comparability:

- separate generated evidence from the recommendations that would be developed
- based on this evidence: “levelled” approach
- consistent point of reference
- information to be “stored” and accessible for future reference

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION:

- Does a joint framework seem useful?
- What aspects would be relevant for such a framework?
- How could a framework be developed?
- How to ensure sustainability of a framework?

❖ IMPROVED HANDLING OF INDICATORS

HSA base assessment methods on indicators – increase comparability and reproducibility:

- Joint approach to indicator use:
 - Clarity on indicator use with common/ consistent definitions
 - Identification of a common core set of indicators
- More emphasis on data consistency could increase validity for comparison
- Clear and consistent terminology
- Health Data Collaborative: Common agenda for measurement and accountability

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION:

- How to increase joint approach to indicator use?
- Possible to identify core set of indicators?
- How to identify core set of indicators?
- How to align to measurement and accountability agenda of HDC?

❖ ROLE OF DEEP DIVE TOOLS

Tools that focus only on a specific technical area, e.g. one of the six health system building blocks, or a specific service delivery area

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION:

- “Deep dives” to be included in this review with the aim to strengthen harmonization and alignment also between whole system and deep-dive tools?
- How to identify relevant deep dive tools?
- What selection criteria to use (huge variety and amount of relevant deep dive tools)?

❖ COMMON UNDERSTANDING ON HSA FOLLOW-UP AND USE OF RESULTS

Established processes for **follow-up action** and **ensuring a good use** of the assessment and its results might reduce the likelihood of undertaking multiple assessments and thus decrease some of the country burden of assessments; e.g. by maintaining access to results by national and international stakeholders.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION:

- What factors determine the quality of follow-up action and the use of the assessment and its results?
- Is it possible to influence /change those factors?
- Possible to establish reliable process for follow-up action?
- How to generate additional entry points for more country-led approaches?

Thank you

KATJA ROHRER-HEROLD

K.ROHRER@GMX.NET