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Perspectives of stakeholders of the free maternity services for mothers in Kenya: lessons for universal health coverage**Beverly M. Ochieng***Community Health and Development, Kenya*

Background: The strategic aim of universal health coverage (UHC) is to ensure that everyone can use health services they need without risk of financial hardship. Linda Mama (Taking care of the mother) initiative focuses on the most vulnerable women, newborns and infants in offering free health services. Financial risk protection is one element in the package of measures that provides overall social protection, as well as protection against severe financial difficulties in the event of pregnancy, childbirth, neonatal and perinatal health care for mothers and their children.

Purpose: The aim of this study was to find out the extent of awareness, and involvement among managers, service providers and consumers of Linda mama supported services and benefits of the initiative from the perspectives of consumers, providers and managers.

Methods: We carried out cross sectional study in western Kenya. Qualitative techniques was used to collect data from purposively selected Linda Mama project implementors, managers, service providers and service consumers. Data analysis was based on thematic content analysis.

Findings: Participation in Linda Mama, either in providing or using, was more prominent among managers and service providers. Routine household visits by community health volunteers to sensitize mothers was core to the initiative. Managers and providers of services displayed profound awareness of how requiring identification cards and telephone numbers had the potential to undermine equity by excluding those in greater need of care such as under-age pregnant adolescents. Maternity and mother child health services improved as a result of the funds received by health facilities.

Conclusion: The initiative influenced attitudes on health facility delivery through: Partnership among key stakeholders and highlighting the need for enhanced partnership with the communities. It enhanced the capacity of health facilities to deliver high quality comprehensive, essential care package and easing economic burden.

Biography

Beverly M. Ochieng holds a PhD in Community Health and Development, a Master of Science Degree in Community Health and Development, and a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Community Health and Psychology. She is currently a Research Fellow with the Tropical Institute of Community Health, and her research interests include the strengthening of health systems aimed at enhancing access to quality care at the community level by providing evidence to influence policy and practice. She has held a range of senior leadership roles and participated in collaborative research on community health and the development of health systems, both locally and internationally.