

Prime Minister's Remarks on Universal Health Coverage

Delivered at the UHC forum held in Tokyo, Dec. 14, 2017



Background and overview of UHC Forum 2017

Exactly two years ago, Japan held an international conference in Tokyo and expressed its strong commitment to promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Japan is very pleased to have held the “UHC Forum 2017” on a scale much larger than two years ago jointly with the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF.

Importance of UHC and Japan's recent efforts

For many years, Japan has placed emphasis on the global health agenda from the perspective of human security. In particular, the promotion of UHC is an essential element of the initiative to realize a society that leaves no one behind, the core principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on this recognition, at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit last year, Japan, as President of the Summit, advocated for the first time at the leaders' level a vision for promoting UHC with better preparedness for pandemics. Since then, Japan has been calling for efforts to realize UHC together with the rest of the international community and has also been making its own efforts, including through the announcement at TICAD VI of “UHC in Africa” and making full use of such occasions as the United Nations General Assembly this year. Moreover,

last year, Japan formulated the Basic Principles of the Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative. We plan to share with other Asian countries our own experience of UHC in an aging society in terms of systems such as universal health insurance and long-term care insurance.

Five major challenges to be addressed

Meanwhile, there remain many challenges that we must overcome to achieve UHC. I will touch upon five aspects we need to address in order to accelerate the promotion of UHC in the future.

The first challenge: Momentum at the global level

The first aspect is the need to strengthen global momentum towards UHC. It was decided in United Nations resolutions adopted this month to hold a U.N. high-level meeting on UHC in 2019 and to designate December 12 as International Universal Health Coverage Day. This is a huge step towards strengthening this momentum. Japan will also host the Nutrition for Growth Summit in Tokyo in 2020 to promote efforts in the field of nutrition, which constitutes a foundational element of health. Furthermore, as an outcome of this Forum, in order to accelerate achievement of the UHC-related targets in the SDGs by 2030, I propose setting intermediate targets by 2023, the midpoint as we head towards the SDGs target year. Let us aim by 2023 to extend essential health coverage to a further 1 billion people and halve to 50 million the number of people being pushed into extreme poverty by health expenses. To achieve these intermediate targets, Japan will continue to make its utmost efforts to develop a global framework to promote UHC, together with Secretary-General Guterres of the United Nations and other leaders of the international community.

The second challenge: Cooperation at the country level

The second aspect we need to address is the need to develop and implement a framework for cooperation at the country level. To realize UHC, it is necessary to make

cross-sectoral efforts covering such fields as nutrition and water and sanitation in addition to health systems strengthening. We propose that individual countries should establish or strengthen platforms to promote UHC. These platforms, to be under the ownership of individual governments, will support the development of plans and capacity building needed to achieve UHC in individual countries through organic cooperation among stakeholders, including international organizations, development partners, and private-sector players. In order to flesh out this proposal, Japan, together with partners including the World Bank, WHO, and UNICEF, has launched the “Tokyo Joint UHC Initiative,” and we have already started activities in pilot countries. Going forward, we will share the knowledge gained from pioneering cases with more countries and organizations.

The third challenge: Continually monitoring progress

The third aspect is the continual monitoring of progress. The report jointly issued at this Forum by WHO and the World Bank represents an epoch-making initiative in that it for the first time officially measures progress towards the achievement of UHC using the uniform indicator endorsed by the United Nations. We will support future UHC Forums to encourage the continuation and development of such monitoring.

The fourth challenge: Securing domestic and foreign finances

Fourth, securing sustainable financial resources for



In Ghana in Africa, the nutritional status of infants is improving through a supplement called KOKO Plus that was developed by a Japanese company and its partners. The supplement is added to infants' complementary food during the cooking process. See “We Are Tomodachi” Japan in Africa Edition 2016 (https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2016/japan_in_africa_edition_2016/cuttingedge_technologies.html). © The Ajinomoto Foundation



The Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research is a preeminent facility for research on infectious diseases in West Africa. The institute is named in honor of Japanese bacteriologist Dr. Hideyo Noguchi, who conducted pioneering research into the cause of yellow fever. See “We Are Tomodachi” Japan in Africa Edition 2016 (https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2016/japan_in_africa_edition_2016/fighting_infectious_diseases.html).

UHC is an urgent task. It is important for each government, including not only health ministries but also finance ministries, to mobilize domestic resources in a stable manner and to complement them with international assistance in an effective manner.

The fifth challenge: Innovation

As the fifth and final aspect for us to address, I would like to stress the importance of innovation. In Africa, an innovative action has been launched employing drones using Japanese technology to help provide healthcare services to remote locations in Africa that have until now been out of reach. Under the TICAD framework, we will share these innovative experiences and promote support for global health.

Japan's assistance pledge

In order to promote swift progress in these areas in a comprehensive manner, Japan pledges to provide UHC assistance worth a total of 2.9 billion dollars. Through this package, Japan will strongly support the efforts of countries and organizations.

Forum results

UHC Forum 2017 was attended by world leaders who exercise leadership in the field of global health. I am pleased to report that the Forum resulted in an exchange of insights that will set forth the future direction for the promotion of UHC.