

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

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Abstract

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. A descriptive case study design using an analytical framework was used. Literature from well-researched articles were examined. Findings demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by healthcare delivery in developing countries, types, contextual factors, challenges, and solutions of private sector engagement were the key elements that influenced the delivery of healthcare services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main contribution of this work is to provide information on private sector engagement and identify gaps that require further inquiry to enhance health systems through strengthened public-private engagements. This information from the study is important to policymakers, private sector actors, researchers, and decision makers to enhance private sector engagement for the sustainability of health programs.

Keywords: Private Sector Engagement, Public-Private Partnership, Private Sector, COVID-19

1. 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 is 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.

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 (Wolf & Toebes, 2016). It also involves public-private partnerships. A public-private partnership (PPP) is a venture that involves collaboration between at least two partners from the public and private sectors (Lee & Vavitsas, 2021). These partnerships combine the strengths of both sectors to address healthcare challenges effectively. PPPs can involve joint infrastructure projects, service provision, or sharing expertise and resources.

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 (Hartill, 2021). It encompasses a wide range of businesses and industries that aim to generate profits and provide goods or services to consumers. The private sector could support health programmes through effective engagement.

During the coronavirus (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 (Meghani, Hariyani, Das, & Bennett, 2022). This is an ongoing global health crisis caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (World Health Organization, 2020). 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.

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. Some studies were conducted to understand the role played by the private sector in tackling this pandemic. However, there is still a knowledge gap on lessons learned on how the health sector can tap into the support of the private sector through effective engagement for the sustainability of healthcare service delivery.

Traditionally, healthcare has been primarily provided by the public sector, but the private sector's role has grown significantly in recent decades due to various factors, including globalization, technological advancements, and changing healthcare needs. Studies reveal that healthcare delivery systems in most developing countries remain heavily donor-dependent in terms of funding. However, this donor funding keeps reducing annually. Inadequate health budget allocation by respective governments has worsened the situation. As a result, health systems remain severely challenged and weak due to inadequate financial resources that goes towards the health sector of which if private sector engagement were harnessed can salvage this current situation.

Inadequate information on the subject matter remains a challenge. This literature review will provide additional information on key challenges being faced by the health sector, types of private sector engagement, what contextual factors motivated the private sector to join hands with the public sector in the fight against COVID-19, and what challenges and solutions they faced during this partnership. This 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, private sector engagement is multifaceted and can have a transformative impact on healthcare systems and public health outcomes. Hence, the study will establish areas that require further research to enhance private sector engagement for sustainability of healthcare service delivery.

2. Literature Review

A literature review is a critical and thorough summary of prior research and scholarly articles on a specific

topic (Denney & Tewksbury, 2012). It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge, theories, methodologies, and findings related to the chosen subject. The objective of this review is to examine the articles written on key challenges faced by the health sector, types of private sector engagements, contextual factors that affect PSE, and challenges and solutions of PSE.

2.1 Key Challenges and Solutions of Healthcare delivery

Oleribe et al. (2019) established key challenges being faced by healthcare systems in 11 African countries, Cuba, Portugal, and the United Kingdom, and these included inadequate health workers, little budgetary allocation to the health sector, and poor leadership and management. The study went on to suggest solutions to these challenges, which included increasing funding for the health sector, building the capacity of workers, and ensuring political will and support for the health sector.

Another study highlighted that the Nigerian health sector faces many challenges, such as poor funding and performance, and there was evidence of low participation by the private sector (Ejughemre, 2014). Such challenges exist in many developing countries whose health budget depends on donor funding, which is continuously decreasing annually, thereby negatively affecting the provision of health services.

2.2 Types of Private Sector Engagement

The study by Whyte and Olivier (2016) reviewed eight (8) different types of public-private engagements (PPEs) that have been implemented in southern Africa for health financing and delivery, and these include public-private partnership, social marketing, sector-wide approach, public-private mix, vouchers, contracting out, dual practise regulation, and financial support. PPEs implemented in South Africa were biased towards those involved in profit-making and international organizations. It will be vital to consider the informal sector and get comparative information on private sector engagement.

2.3 Contextual Factors of Private Sector Engagement

The public-private collaboration in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria was significantly influenced by various contextual factors, including individual characteristics (industry expertise and position, philanthropy, and personal or economic interest), the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, weak health systems, and the multi-sectoral nature of the response to the pandemic (Okeke, Egbiremolen, Uzochukwu, Mbachu, & Onwujekwe, 2022). This study did not include focused group discussions and in-depth interviews with key leaders in the private sector to gain a deeper understanding of factors that could motivate private actors to support healthcare delivery.

2.4 Challenges and Solutions of Private Sector Engagement

Joudyian, Doshmangir, Mahdavi, Tabrizi, and Gordeev (2021) explored the associated challenges (education, management, human and financial resources, technological systems) in the start-up and implementation periods- and solutions (digital tools) of private sector engagement in health programs.

Oleribe et al. (2019) established that inadequate workforce and budget, and poor leadership and management remain the main challenges faced by the health sector and went on to suggest that private sector's access to financial resources, investments, and expertise are valuable in addressing complex challenges that often require substantial funding. Apart from the small sample size, many of the responders

were epidemiologists at different career levels. There is a need to consider increasing the sample size to include other professionals.

3. Methodology

Documents on peer-reviewed journal articles on private sector engagement-related health programmes were investigated using scholarly search engines, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and Semantic Scholar. To get the most important and current scientific articles for analysis and discussion, the search was restricted to the period between 2012 and 2022. Kraus, Mahto, & Walsh (2021) theorise that a literature review as a discipline provides information and understanding of related variables, occurrences, factors, and context. This involves a review of studies conducted with the goal of reconciling conflicting research findings and identifying gaps and areas that require future studies (Pittaway, Holt, & Broad, 2014).

Many journal articles were examined but only 25 were considered for this review. Most of the peer-reviewed journal articles found 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. As guided by Husted and Salazar (2006), this review utilised an analytical framework that enabled the analysis of data.

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

4. Findings

4.1 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 (Oleribe et al., 2019). 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 (Ejughemre, 2014).

Another study conducted in India established that 47.4% of private medical sector contribution was suboptimal and 58.2% of 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 (Davalbhakta et al., 2020).

Other studies revealed that the private sector remains an important partner in providing resources that enhance healthcare. Sacks (2012) demonstrated that 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. The use of PSEs can provide financial support as the private sector remains a key stakeholder in the provision of health care services (Joudyian et al., 2021).

4.2 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 (Whyle & Olivier, 2016). These approaches are commonly employed in various sectors to improve service delivery, public health, and development outcomes. Among the PPEs reported, social marketing was the most popular one used in southern African countries.

Studies demonstrate that stakeholder engagement has positive effects on scale-up in HIV/AIDS service delivery (Biesma et al., 2009). 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 (Whyle & Olivier, 2016). 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.

4.3 Contextual Factors of Private Sector Engagement

As reported by Okeke et al. (2022), four (4) contextual factors, which are 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 include human resource management, financial capacity, and sanctions imposed by the state (Sheaff et al., 2013).

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 benefit (Okeke et al, 2022).

Another prominent factor 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 (World Health Organization, 2021).

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 (Joudyian et al, 2021). 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.

4.4 Challenges and Solutions of PSE

The study by Joudyian et al., (2021) established that 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. This study highlighted information using digital tools as the main solution.

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 (Kabwama, et al., 2022). 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 (Joudyian et al., 2021).

5. 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, which remains underfunded. 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 (Wolf & Toebes, 2016). Further, 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. In a study by Joudyian et al, (2021), it was established that implementation of PSE increased access and provision of treatment and prevention services in India and several African countries. 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.

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 (Leigland, 2018). 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 (Whyte & Olivier, 2016). In the context of southern Africa, this approach may be used to encourage positive health behaviors, like promoting the use of mosquito nets to prevent malaria or encouraging HIV testing. Contracting out refers to the government's practice of outsourcing the delivery of specific services to private sector organizations (ibid). It allows the government to leverage private sector expertise and resources to improve service delivery.

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 (Okeke et al., 2022). 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 (Kabwama, et al., 2022).

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 (Davalbhakta, et al., 2020).

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 (Okeke et al, 2022). 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.

6. Conclusion

The studies reviewed articles on the challenges faced by healthcare delivery in developing countries, models, contextual factors, and challenges and solutions of PSE. The weaknesses in healthcare systems coupled with inadequate funding highlighted the importance of private sector engagement in filling resource gaps, expanding capacity, and supporting delivery of healthcare. Most governments, especially in developing countries partnered with different organizations including the private sector to deal with the pandemic. Different private institutions provided financial support and leadership. This review has demonstrated that it's essential to ensure that private sector engagement should be transparent, accountable, and align with public interest and societal needs. Through active and enhanced private sector engagement, healthcare delivery and systems would be strengthened.

PPPs should be established to facilitate joint decision-making, resource allocation, and risk-sharing like it demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic response. Addressing the challenges thoughtfully and proactively can significantly improve the chances of success for PSE initiatives in various contexts, including those in developing countries. Therefore, it is prudent to enhance collaboration to garner support for provision of healthcare through PSE initiatives.

7. 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.

8. Further Studies

When the private sector collaborates with public health agencies and other stakeholders, it brings in resources, expertise, and innovation that can complement and strengthen existing health programs. Therefore, there is a need for further studies on what factors motivate private sector engagement for the sustainability of health programs. Further, there is a need for further studies to assess the impact of private sector engagement on the health program's outcomes.

Funding information

No funding was involved.

Conflict of interest

There was no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

No datasets were generated or used for analysis during this review. The review relied on desk review of

scholarly written articles.

Consent for publication

Not applicable

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