Terms of Reference

Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 and the economic crisis on essential health service delivery, healthcare access and financial risk protection

1. Background

1.1 Introduction

The Sri Lankan health system has been facing a dual challenge in ensuring the continuity of essential service provision due to COVID-19 and the economic crisis. The impact on the health system due to COVID-19 has fluctuated according to the various phases of the epidemic, with the country experiencing three distinct waves over the past two years. Identification of the extent and specific areas of disruptions and the responses to mitigate challenges and recover is of paramount importance for building back better. Currently this challenge is further compounded by the ongoing economic crisis which has challenged the health system with critical shortages of medicines and supplies. This too has serious and far-reaching consequences leading to disruption of services at all levels of care.

Furthermore, both COVID-19 and the economic crisis has had demand side implications as well. There is evidence to indicate that non-COVID health services continue to be impacted even in the “new normal period”, with disruptions to health education and counselling services, increased waiting time to obtain services; high probability of missing important diseases presenting with respiratory symptoms such as Tuberculosis due to reluctance of seeking health care and persons with chronic illness avoiding visits to health facilities. The ongoing economic crisis compounds these issues further leading to reduced access of healthcare services. Moreover, any disruption to services in the government sector will further increase out of pocket expenditure, driving more persons towards catastrophic health expenditures and impoverishment.

WHO identified the importance of the detailed analysis of the above issues and has previously (in 2021) conducted the following activities;

1. Supported 3 rounds of PULSE survey which provides an overview of the situation at country level

2. Conducted a study on disruption of essential health service due to COVID-19 in the WHO South-East Region which resulted in two systematic reviews;
   a. The impact of COVID-19 on essential health service provision for endemic infectious diseases in the South-East Asia region
b. The impact of COVID-19 on essential health service provision for non-communicable diseases in the South-East Asia region
A further review of impact of COVID-19 on essential health service provision for RMNCH services in the South-East Asia region is ongoing.


The current assessment is expected to add to the evidence base already generated through the above activities. Further, it will assess the impact of the economic crisis which was not previously considered.

1.2 Objective

To conduct a comprehensive assessment of the impact of COVID-19 and the economic crisis on essential health service delivery, healthcare access and financial risk protection and provide evidence-based recommendations to the Ministry of Health. This should capture information on service disruption (through an institutional survey) and barriers to access including financial barriers (through a household survey). The assessment should focus on the impact on men and women separately.

2. Planned timelines

The activity is to be completed by 30 September 2022

3. Requirements

3.1 Work to be performed

The contractual partner shall;

1. Develop the methodology for assessing the impact of COVID-19 and the economic crisis on essential health service delivery, healthcare access and financial risk protection
2. Develop the relevant the study instruments for data collection; should consider both the supply side (inputs from the institutional, district, provincial and national level stakeholders and the stakeholders from preventive campaigns) and demand side (household survey)
3. Obtaining the relevant administrative and ethical clearances
4. Conduct the data collection
5. Detailed analysis of the collected data and development of a comprehensive technical report
6. Development of actionable policy recommendations for strengthening the health system based on the evidence generated

The contractual partner shall work closely with the relevant technical staff of WHO at all stages of the project.

3.2 Deliverables

1. A detailed proposal including all relevant study instruments developed in consultation with the WHO technical team
2. Final technical report and complete database

4. Expected characteristics of the provider

The contractual agency shall;

- Possess a team of experts with the expertise in the fields of public health/ health systems/ primary care/ health economics/ statistics and related fields
- The lead consultant should have an advanced university degree in Public Health / Community Medicine with minimum 10 years of experience in working on health systems/ primary care/UHC
- Have a thorough understanding and experience of work in Sri Lankan context especially on the UHC and PHC reorganization process
- Have previous experience of conducting similar assessments at national/subnational level
- Have past experience in working with WHO
- Have proven experience in documentation and technical reporting

Curriculum vitae of the identified experts should be annexed to the proposal.

5. Place of assignment

Sri Lanka