

Health Policy Compendium: A prognosis of Nigeria's National Health Policy of 1988, 2004, and 2016

A team of experts conducted a review of a set of 3 national Health policies and their implementation in Nigeria. They highlighted a number of groups that play a crucial role in the translation of the policy into plans. They also noted the lack of monitoring and Evaluation plans in the policy Implementation.

Abstract

The sustainability of the ideal healthcare system thrives on the successful implementation of national health policy. Over 28 years, Nigeria has had three sequential national health policies in 1988, 2004, and 2016 respectively, but fall short of adequately addressing the health issues of national concerns. The scenarios prompted the necessity for this study to assess the trends of the country's health policies, as a framework that directs health services implementation in the nation. A desk review technique was used to explore both published and unpublished materials to form the study narratives. The review revealed that bureaucrats, stakeholders, development partners, civil society organizations, and pressure groups played crucial roles in the processes of converting national health plans to the three policies. Furthermore, the review, discovered that most of the policy trends covered several health challenges and how to address them, but lacks in the proper monitoring and evaluation of their implementation. As such, further national policy formation should include distinct monitoring and evaluation clauses in every implementation stage, to identify and report obstacles for immediate response.

Keywords: Health-Systems, Policy, Development, Implementation, Sustainability

Introduction

National health policies guide the attainment of good health and well-being. National health policy denotes a country's plans, initiatives, guides, actions, and/or efforts taken toward the provision of healthcare services delivery. The WHO defines national health policy as a unanimous decision and/or the lines of action to be taken on health issues that need to be addressed.^{1,2,3} While national health policies in Nigeria's context refer to all policies on the matters of national health concerns authorized by the Federal Executive Council.^{4,5} As such, national health policy should be able to manage the physical, mental,

and social well-being of the citizens throughout their lives. To be healthy is to be in good physical, mental, social, and/or spiritual condition; in other words, is the ability to be free from illness or discomfort.

Attainable national health policies guarantee successful population health. Several elements come into play when determining whether a population is healthy or not, these include factors like the environment, genetics, income, education, and health-seeking behavior.¹ This suggests that for a nation to create and sustain a healthy population, it must implement sensible health policies that address the needs of its citizens of all ages and establish health priorities. Because, better health is essential to human pleasure and well-being.⁴ Such health policies will thwart growing health challenges and promote the provision of quality healthcare services for its people, leading to the attainment of a complete state of health. As healthy populations live longer, they become more productive and significantly contribute to national development.⁴

Government agencies coordinate the implementation of national health policies. Governmental agencies manage financing, and other healthcare services activities, to achieve this, the government regulates the functions of the three tiers of healthcare delivery systems and services like health insurance schemes among others. The general objective of every health policy is to provide protective, preventative, and rehabilitative healthcare to every person in the nation, in the spirit of Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC).

Therefore, the government in Nigeria deliberately attempts to address health issues through the formation and implementation of the three national health policies.⁹ Despite the efforts, several health issues could not be adequately addressed, this has prompted the need for this review to assess the landscape of the three Nigerian national health policies to suggest a means of sustainable health policy formulation and implementation for Nigeria and beyond.

Methodology

Study design

The research employed a descriptive-analytic study technique. Various data-sourcing methods and techniques were employed in the analysis of Nigeria's National Health policies from 1988 to 2016 through literature search and review. The reviewed documents

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are those reviewed from the ministries departments and agencies (MDAs) such as FMOH, NPHCDA, NACA, NMBP, NTBLCP, and reports from donor agencies and development partners like the WHO, SDGs, UNICEF, World Bank, and USAID among others. The review enables the understanding of the policy development through which the study narratives were built. During the document review, a data extraction checklist was designed to help the extraction of relevant information, through which, themes and sub-themes of the study emerged and were thereafter organized and categorized to ease analysis. This approach is suitable for policy analysis and assessment of policy elements that support successful implementation and achievement of the intended outcomes.

Literature Search

A rigorous literature search of Google Scholar and other databases for Secondary data was searched for trends in health indices, disease burden, emerging health issues, and health systems which encompasses health financing, health infrastructures, and human resources for health. The secondary data are from National and International surveys such as the Multi Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS), and National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). National Strategic Health Development Plans (NSHDPs), National Strategic Framework (NSF), National AIDS (NARSH), National Tuberculosis Prevalence Survey, World Health Statistics (WHS), World Data Sheet (WDS), World Bank Reports (WBRs) and other National survey reports were reviewed.

The search was conducted in four phases, as follows.

Phase -1 Determining keyword search parameters

A list of articles was arrived at using Google Search Builder. The builder used in the search was deliberately created using appropriate options from the drop-down items using title/abstract, and a combination of keywords using AND, OR, NOT variables, to arrive at 68, 373 articles. It was further reviewed and narrowed to the near-relevant articles.

Phase - 2 Merging of keyword search

An amalgamation of all keywords was involved in scrutinizing the articles on any of the three Nigerian Health Policy 1988; 2004 and 2016 for analysis. , , A small number of articles were found, and this was attributed to the fact that only three National health policies were ever developed in Nigeria. There were only a few more publications found on health policy analysis of a few other countries.

Phase -3 Additional Keywords search

Additional keyword terms commonly used in healthcare like health system, Nigerian healthcare system, and national development plans were used in searching for more literature. Many relevant peer-reviewed articles were found and used in the study.

Phase - 4 Advanced Search Using Builder

The results obtained from the two phases were merged and reviewed further for more relevant literature.

Furthermore, backward and forward reference searches were carried out in all the phases of the literature search.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were extracted and recorded in Excel and Word 2010. The response was analyzed based on its relevance to Nigeria's national health policy, in 1988, 2004, and 2016; by a way of generation of common themes and sub-themes. Important quotes from the literature, and to some extent, areas that the literature did not cover like implementation, performance and challenges. Therefore, following a thorough review of the literature, a health policy analysis that relates academic opinions to scientific evidence on Nigeria's health policy was selected. The obtained data was used to describe the perspectives of Nigeria's national health policy, based on the focus of the review and what necessitated and/or triggered the development of Nigeria's national health policy. These were all the main causes as shown in Figure 1, that led to the development of the three national health plans.

Results

This section presents the results that emerged from the reviews of Nigeria's National Health Policy of 1988, 2004, and 2016 respectively. The reviewed documents include the official government reports and those obtained from the development partners' reports. Other materials are textbooks, journals, internet sources, and policy brief documents, applying rationalistic and purposive selection techniques.

Table 1 History of Health Development Plans and Policies in Nigeria From 1945 - 2016

Names of the Policies	Period	Interval
First Colonial Development Plan	1945- 1955	10 Years
Second Colonial Development Plan	1956 - 1962	6 Years
The First National Health Development Plan	1962- 1968	6 Years
The Second National Health Development Plan	1970 - 1975	5 Years
The Third National Health Development Plan	1975 - 1980	5 Years
The Fourth National Health Development Plan	1981- 1985	4 Years
National Health Policy (First)	1988 - 2003	16 Years
Revised National Health Policy (Second)	2004- 2014	12 Years
National Health Policy (Third) Current	2016 to date	Not Yet Revised

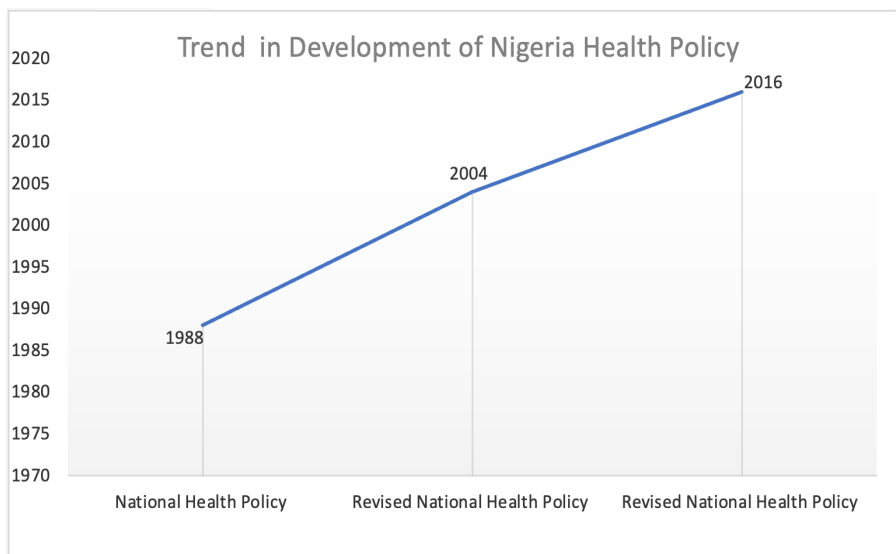
Source: Desk Review

Table 1: Shows the trends of various health development plans and policies developed in Nigeria, starting from the colonial era in 1945 to the year 2016. The table revealed various years, names, and durations of national health plans and policy reforms in the Nigerian context. The table denotes a historical

guide for health policymakers to understand how the previous actors set healthcare priorities and strategic plans for the right actions that address the rising health problems. It also presents in sequence the health plans and policies in chronological order. As such, the guides

the production of similar procedures - including agenda building and policy formulation, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, and the processes that determine which factors and actors influenced the processes.

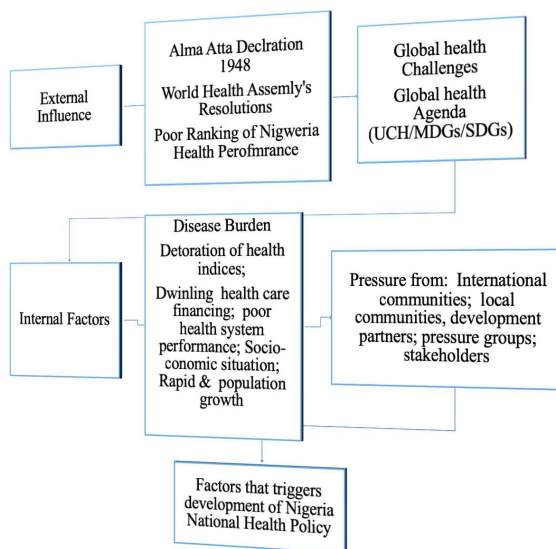
Figure 1: The Trends of National Health Policy in Nigeria



Source: Desk Review

Figure 1 above shows the trend of national health policy over the years beginning from 1988 to 2004 and 2016. The figure revealed that the first policy was developed in 1988, followed by its revised version in 2004, and the updated and improved version in 2016. The figure further shows the trend in Nigeria’s health policy over 28 years. The three national health policies (NHP) are called: National Health Policy and Strategy to Achieve Health for All Nigerians – 1988 (NHP, 1988); the National Health Policy Revised Edition – 2004 (NHP, 2004), and the updated National Health Policy - 2016 respectively (NHP, 2016), as seen on the vertical line. The linear direction indicates the slight in years upwards, which are prepared to be geared toward addressing the increasing health challenges confronting the country. It is a conscious effort by the government to solve the identified problems of society by taking cognizance of the public interest. Furthermore, the figure presents a fact that underscores the existence of ample opportunities through the periodic policy formation that sought to improve the current health situation on those of various decades by effectively implementing the policies on the available and tested resources through focusing on intangible resources such as willingness, motivation, conviction, endurance, responsibility, and ownership, by the presented yearly trends. The figure also provides a succinct insight into the contents, contexts, and development period of the succeeded Nigeria National Health Policy reviews.

Figure 2: Factors Responsible for the Development of National Health Policy



Source: Document Review

Figure 2: Summarizes key factors that trigger the development of the three national health policies. Both internal and external factors were identified as the drivers that influenced the country’s decision to review, revise, and develop health policies over 26 years. National

health policy development is shown to be produced by different actors, on different types of issues such as health development guides, and health system strengthening, including several other aspects of health issues as the policy names indicate. Evidence from both primary and secondary data clearly shows that donor agencies, bureaucrats, and civil society organizations among other stakeholders, contribute immensely to Nigeria's health policy development. These actors as summarized in the above figure are the major drivers and influencers of health matters in Nigeria, they direct, push, and ensure that the right thing is done rightly, while pressure groups like CSOs and media serve as advocates and watchdogs

over the government commitment to successful policy implementation. The figure further highlights some challenges such as poor funding for the health sector, the increased burden of diseases, and weak health systems in Nigeria, despite the implementation of the three health policies. Additionally, the figure attributed the implementation challenges to poor funding, and socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political factors, especially poor attention in the areas of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation processes and recording of the strengths and weaknesses for prompt improvement.

Table 2: Policy Content and Context Analysis

Policy Name	Policy Content	Policy Context	Policy Process/ Actions	Actors	Comments
The National Health Policy and Strategy to Achieve Health for All Nigerians, 1988.	The goal was to achieve Health for All Nigerians. It has objectives, targets, and policy thrust.	Alma ata declaration, MDGs. It has a Target, Underlying Principles and Values, Declaration	Agenda building, policy formulation, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.	Stakeholders Engagement	Was the First National Health Policy ever developed since Independence
Revised National Health Policy, 2004	It has Salient features: The Policy Objective was to strengthen the national health system such that it will able to provide effective, efficient quality, accessible, and affordable health services that will improve the health status of Nigerians	National Health System, health status, Health policy, legislation, and health sector reform agenda	Agenda building, policy formulation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It has a Target, Underlying Principles and Values, Declaration and Commitments, and 7 Major Thrusts of Health Policy.	Stakeholders in the health sector in particular and the Nigerian public and the international health community in general.	Yielded little better health outcomes
Promoting the Health of Nigerians to Accelerate Socio-economic Development, 2016	The goal is to strengthen Nigeria's health system, particularly the primary healthcare sub-system, to deliver quality effective, efficient, equitable, accessible, affordable, acceptable, and comprehensive healthcare services to all Nigerians. It has a vision, Mission, Goal, Objectives, Social Values, and Guiding Principles.	The National Health Policy is situated within the national development agenda including Vision 20:2020 which articulates Nigeria's economic growth and development strategies for the period between 2009 and 2020.	The process for developing the new National health policy was initiated by the FMOH through consensus building among stakeholders. A Technical Working Group (TWG) comprising some officials of FMOH and its development partners, representatives of the private health sector, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) the Regulatory Bodies, a State government, and the Academia was constituted.	Officials of FMOH and its development partners, representatives of the private health sector, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Regulatory Bodies, a State government, and the Academia	Developed at critical stages in the evolution of the Nigeria Health System and had far-reaching impact in improving the performance of the system throughout their lifetime

Source: Document Review

Table 2: The table presents the content, context, processes, actions, and actors in the national health policy development processes in summary. It further, reveals the similarities and differences between the three policy documents. The table provides an insight into the processes adopted in the development and implementation and subsequent reviews of the three Nigeria National Health Policies. Factors that triggered or necessitated the development which includes international interest pressure groups and stakeholders pressure from within the country, and the government's national health agenda, has all led to the development of the three national health policy plan as a strategic tool of health policy implementation across the 35 states of the federation.

Discussion

Healthcare service delivery in Nigeria was guided by short-term planning for a considerable number of years until the introduction of the national health policy in 1988. Before that the Nigeria health system was based on traditional medicine and thereafter orthodox medicine was introduced by the colonial explorers on arrival in Nigeria. These historical trends gradually led to the birth of health plans and policies. The plans of the colonial era led to the establishment of military healthcare facilities and civilian hospitals by the government, which included all three tiers of health services provision.

Between 1945 and 1955, the first Colonial Health Development Plan was in place; following its expiration, the second plan began to take shape in 1956. Later, Nigeria achieved independence. The post-independence national development plans, which ran from 1962 to 1985 when the fourth post-independence plan ended, came quickly after the country gained its independence in 1960.¹⁶ In light of these historical trends and the fact that health is a human right, a sensitive economic determinant, and a growing concern by governments to enhance population health, the development of a national health policy becomes necessary and a top priority. The necessity to create a policy as an articulated course of action to act as the road map for its health services delivery implementation is among the factors that made the development of national health policies necessary (.^{17,18} Nigeria has so far had three national health policies with peculiar trends in contents and contexts.

The Trends in Nigeria's National Health Policies

Within 28 years Nigeria produced three national health policies in 1988, 2004, and then in 2016. The three policies are namely, the National Health Policy and Strategy to Achieve Health for All Nigerians in 1988; and the National Health Policy revised in 2004 and 2016 respectively. The recent efforts guided by the 2016 policy are geared toward addressing the increasing health challenges confronting the country (NHP, 1988, 2004, 2016). Focusing on the achievement of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and other global health-related agendas as its primary goals were guided by the SDG 3 provision, also known as the UN 2030 agenda. The 2016 national health policy was developed along with an implementation strategy, which is the achievement of

the UHC.

Nigeria has made some progress in the performance of its health system in an endeavor to achieve universal health coverage and meet the policy thrusts outlined in the 2016 National Health Policy, even though achieving the MDGs was not successful. Therefore, the national health plans of 2016, enshrined maternal and child health as well as major communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, TB, and Malaria as threats in need of attention when it comes to UHC implementation. The nation was able to stop the spread of wild poliovirus over the period under consideration (NHP, 2016; NSHDP, 2017). This achievement forms the rationale for improving national health policy implementation prowess.

Rationales behind the development of the National Health Policies in Nigeria

In 1988 Nigeria's National Health Policy and Strategy was formulated to achieve health for all Nigerians. It was developed and promulgated in compliance with the Alma Ata Declaration of 1978. The policy was informed at the time the nation's health system experienced numerous problems, uncertainties, and difficulties. In addition, the 1988 National Health Policy aims to embrace the new health paradigm announced at the Alma Atta and by the recommendations made by the World Health Assemblies (WHA)(NHP, 2016). The policy document of 1988 was created at pivotal points in the development of the Nigerian health system and had a significant impact on raising system performance (Abdullahi, 2011).

After sixteen (16) years since the creation of the first national health policy, several things have changed, including the population of Nigeria's rapid population growth, which contributed to the burden of disease in the nation and necessitated new planning for health services to handle the teeming population. Health system issues made the already woefully inadequate state of the health infrastructure, human resources, commodities, equipment, and vaccinations worse. In this regard, the government of the federation in collaboration with development partners, and other actors with a stake in healthcare developed and produced the national health policy of 2004.

The transition between the policy of 2004 and that of 2016 was driven by multiple factors. The Nigerian government consults key stakeholders such as health experts, leaders, policymakers, health providers, health planners and administrators, and representatives of health-related sectors contributions. During the period of the inputs, the stakeholders critically examined the aforementioned factors confronting the Nigerian national health systems which demand corrective action that would carry the Nigerian health system. The recommendations from the stakeholders led to the National Health Policy of 2016 (NHP, 2004, 2016; NSHDP, 2017).

The three national health policies were the results of various variables and trends. The policies take into account the international, national, and local health challenges and the new realities and trends within the country's health systems. However, the national health policies are not negative issues, among them was Nigeria's health system performance, and the spread of

the emerging and reemerging disease burden, during these periods. Furthermore, the updated national health policies embodied the nation's governments and citizens' shared desire to establish a comprehensive, primary healthcare-based system. The policy further outlines the objectives, organization, plan, and policy direction of Nigeria's healthcare delivery system up to date, alongside a long-term objective of providing adequate access to quality healthcare services to all Nigerians through all levels of care for the achievement of Universal Health Coverage(NHP, 2016). Succinctly, the policy explicitly explains the functions, roles, and responsibilities of the three tiers of government including the non-governmental actors.

Conclusions

The Nigeria National Health Policy's conception, implementation, and subsequent reviews all shed light on health issues of national concern. The review explores the historical perspectives and trends of the three Nigerian health policies of 1988, 2004, and 2016. Evidence from the obtained empirical information demonstrates that policy formation draws contributions from multiple stakeholders and drivers of health issues in Nigeria. The review supports the notion that a lack of money and significant social, cultural, political, and economic issues, are parts of the challenges confronting the successful implementation of the national health policies.

Additionally, the policies draw their strengths from the multipolarity of the actors involved in the development processes through cross-disciplinary contributions. The review suggests further research to critically evaluate the Nigerian National Health Policy's effectiveness in light of specific policy implementation challenges, and to identify obstacles to its successful implementation and solutions. The review also suggests that the nation should embark on a long-term healthcare financing system, which is the backbone of every health policy implementation.

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