

Streamlining political economy analysis approaches in health systems research

Andrew Brown¹, Denis Okidi², Reuben Kiggundu¹, and Ryan Crow³

¹USAID Medicines, Technologies, and Pharmaceutical Services (MTaPS) Program, ²Management Sciences for Health, ³Overseas Strategic Consulting

Context

There is increasing awareness that addressing problems in national health systems in a sustainable way requires an understanding of the political context and identifying political entry points for initiating change. Political economy analysis (PEA) can be used to understand the political dimensions of any context and inform policy and programs. However, traditional PEA methods are often viewed as complex and resource intensive.

Amidst COVID-19, the USAID Medicines, Technologies, and Pharmaceutical Services (MTaPS) Program developed a methodology for streamlined PEA. Although streamlined PEA uses many of the same tools that support traditional PEA approaches, it can be completed in as little as four weeks and conducted remotely as needed. This allows the PEA to be conducted during the inception or startup phase of a new project, or to be repeated periodically as a means of tracking trends or shifting context.



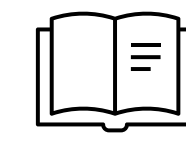
Focus group discussion of Ugandan healthcare workers
Photo credit: Sherie Tumwebaze

Approach

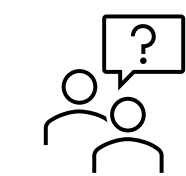
Five key features allow streamlined PEAs to be completed more rapidly than traditional PEAs:



Articulation of focused research questions: Apply the political economy lens to a precise set of issues to identify barriers to change and possible solutions



Targeted desk literature review and stakeholder identification: Prioritize documents created by and for stakeholders likely to be engaged in the study over academic literature and/or broad contextual documents that may be of limited practical value



Rapid questionnaire co-creation: Develop customized questionnaires for each stakeholder interview with team input and consensus using a combination of dialogue and ranked-choice voting



Informed sampling: Use purposive and snowball sampling to ensure that respondents with the greatest understanding of the issues are contacted, while ensuring as wide a variety of perspectives as possible



Actionable, audience-tailored reporting: Ensure that the final report is concise and tightly focused on key findings and recommendations so decision-makers can easily absorb and digest it

Contact:

Andrew Brown
Senior Principal Technical Advisor – Governance and Capacity Development
USAID MTAps Program
anbrown@mtapsprogram.org

Applying streamlined PEA methodology in Uganda

MTaPS used the streamlined PEA methodology in Uganda to understand the political economy factors influencing domestic resource mobilization for family planning products. Key aspects of the team's streamlined PEA approach in Uganda included:

- Remote provision of support
- Targeted landscape analysis
- Focused stakeholder analysis
- Semi-structured interview tool
- Local relationship development
- Open discussions of findings and next step considerations

Using this approach, MTAps was able to capture information on the political economy factors; understand potential opportunities and entry points; and capture voices of diverse stakeholders around key issues on financing and family planning.

Key Takeaways

The streamlined PEA:

- Is a practical and accessible way to explore the political dimensions of a specific health systems issue
- Does not need to be expensive and can be completed by a small team in as little as four weeks
- Helps to capture the voices of various stakeholders (government, civil society, implementing partners, healthcare workers)
- Can generate meaningful findings to inform approaches and provide a detailed view of the stakeholders involved



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