Significance of investing in health for economic growth and social development:

Case of Sri Lanka

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Historical perspective – foundation for UHC

Medicinal trough used for herbal and oil baths

Medicinal trough for herbal and oil baths

Ancient hospital at Polonnarowa after conservation

Surgical instruments of the past

Bronze micro balance used to measure medicines
• The First Health Unit - 1926

• 1st health unit established in 1926 for community-based public health services – before Alma Ata declaration for adoption of the Primary health care approach

Reforms over time..

The Precursors to Sri Lanka’s Health Reforms

- A history of state intervention – tax based system
- Exposure to western medicine
- Introduction of democracy in 1931
- Investments in education and social benefits
Health System Reforms

- **Health Financing** – tax-based and no user fees
- Emphasis on **coverage**– hospitals and community
- Balancing **quality and equitable access**: Compulsory posting and dual medical practice

What are some of the results...

- Life expectancy
- Maternal mortality
- Infant and under 5 mortality
- 100% immunization against common diseases
- Eradication/elimination of polio, filaria and malaria
Life expectancy in relation to GNP

Source: UNICEF 2016

Figure 1.4: Trends in Maternal and Infant Mortality Rates, 1940 - 2009

Source: Registrar General’s Department
Socio economically

- Social development per se significant – particularly in education and health

- Economically less dramatic but there is direct and indirect evidence
  - Positive economic growth even during the conflicts
  - No economic or social collapse even after three internal conflicts
  - Quick recovery from disasters

Weaknesses of the system .......

- The main weaknesses of the system result primarily from underfunding;

- Means implicit rationing of services as services

- Quality can be further improved

- The shift of patients out of the public system may undermine political support for government health services.
Wither Sri Lankan health?

- Faces a few challenges......

Sri Lanka’s emerging challenges...

- Technology
- NCD
- Ageing
- Consumer expectations
What then are the key messages from the Sri Lankan experience …..

1. Democratic accountability can ensure health systems respond needs of poor
2. Health seen as a ‘merit good’ is central to overall development
3. Fair access for all and insurance against catastrophic illness should be a priority goal of health systems
4. Heath system strengthening is the key to good outcomes

In conclusion….

Sri Lanka has been a success in delivering good health at low cost …..

…and now has to manage the challenges posed by changing demography, epidemiology, technology and consumer expectations….

…….. while maintaining equity and fairness.