***Title****:* Sustainable Financing for PHC: Designing a Contributory Health Scheme in Niger State, Nigeria

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**Background:** A Readiness assessment for UHC conducted in Niger State in 2017 showed the existence of poor utilisation of PHC services and that majority of citizen lack access to quality healthcare due to limited pooling and pre-payment systems in the State. Pre-payment systems have been recognised to increase financial protection as well as improve health outcomes (WHO Bulletin 2012). Recognising this, Niger State in collaboration with Results for Development (R4D) and Health Systems Consult Limited (HSCL) is designing a State Contributory Health Scheme (SCHS) for implementation to ensure access to quality health services. This paper describes the process undertaken to design a launch of a contributory health scheme with focus on Primary Health Care (PHC) and vulnerable groups.

**Key objective of the paper:** To present the approach adopted by Niger State in the design of its SCHS as well as key lessons learned in the design process.

**Scheme Design Methodology:** R4D/HSCL and the state have adopted a number of approaches in designing key components of the scheme (resource mobilization, enrolment, strategic purchasing, M&E systems). This includes: quantitative analysis to identify costs and potential revenue amounts to launch scheme, adoption of best practices to guide decisions on prioritization of scheme components for initial launch and scale-up, technical reviews of scheme bill to ensure readiness for passage into law, establishment of design Technical Working Groups (TWGs) and a design finalization committee to advance the scheme design; provision of on-the-job mentoring and trainings to build capacity of Niger SCHS Agency staff and key state actors in healthcare financing.

**Key Lessons Learned**

* The input of key stakeholders (government agencies and partners) is critical to the design process as this creates opportunities to leverage on existing systems and platforms e.g. the means testing approaches to identify poor and vulnerable.
* In settings where a legal framework for the existence of the scheme “the law” is yet to be established, the set-up of strong structures such as design TWGs can be valuable to advance the scheme design and ensure readiness to launch when the law is eventually passed.
* Continuous advocacy and engagement with the government and other important actors is key to ensuring buy-in on some key design components (e.g. resource mobilization) of the SCHS.
* Lessons learned from fellow states, federal government schemes, and international experiences should be leveraged to adopt best practices from countries and states that have operationalized similar schemes.