



Webinar series 2021

Towards Sustainable
Healthcare Systems in Africa

Healthcare policy harmonisation and collaboration amongst governments-A strategy towards sustainable development in Africa

A Webinar Report

9th September 2021

Curated by



Speakers



MODERATOR
Dr. Amit N. Thakker
Executive Chairman,
Africa Health Business



KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Dr. Lia Tadesse
Minister for Health,
Ethiopia



SPEAKER
Ms. Beatrice Mutali
Deputy Regional Director,
UNFPA East and Southern Africa Region



SPEAKER
Dr. Githinji Gitahi
Chief Executive Officer,
Amref Health Africa



SPEAKER
Dr. Karim Bendhaou
Head of Africa Bureau,
MERCK Group and Chair of the
Africa Engagement Committee



SPEAKER
Dr. Danny Thomas Louange
Ministry of Health,
Seychelles

Event Partners



DISCLAIMER & COPYRIGHT

This report from Africa Health Business is a product of Africa Health Business Limited. Copyright © 2021 Africa Health Business Limited. All rights reserved.

Poll Results

During the webinar, we ran polls on the topic to gather opinions, insights and feedback from our attendees.

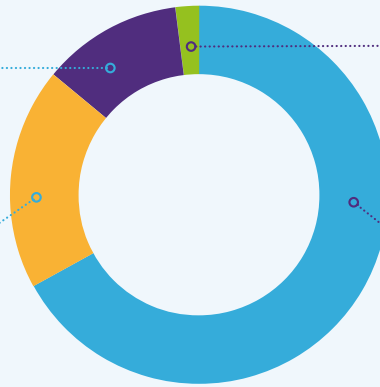
What barriers hinder policy harmonisation in Africa?

12%

Divergent political aspirations

19%

Lack of effective stakeholder participation



2%

Limited bandwidth to expand regulation to different kinds of technologies and across phases of regulation

67%

Weak institutional capacities and mechanisms for implementation of recommendations, monitoring and evaluation

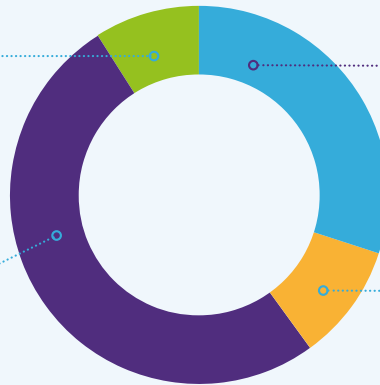
How can private sector contribute to policy harmonisation efforts?

9%

Supporting sustained funding from multiple donors.

51%

Collaborating with governments to ensure efficient evaluation of health technologies



30%

Pooling resources (both technical and financial)

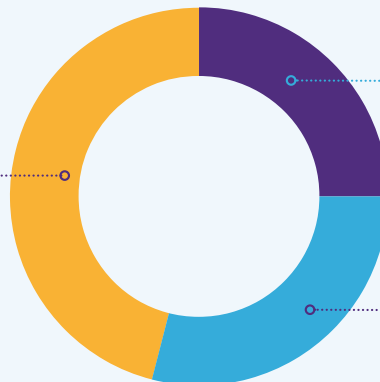
10%

Sharing information

How will policy harmonisation accelerate UHC goal?

46%

Embrace innovation and put systems in place to support scale-up to increase public health impact across the continent.



25%

Nurture a culture of accountability around commitments to UHC, including innovation.

29%

Strengthen and streamline regulatory systems to support research and to get products approved efficiently while also ensuring quality.

Background

Healthcare policy harmonisation is the streamlining of regulation systems across multiple countries. Policy harmonisation and collaboration amongst governments will play an important role in the ability of African countries to achieve universal health coverage (UHC). Many African countries are making progress towards attaining UHC, although the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the availability and the ability of health systems to provide uninterrupted health services. Moving towards UHC requires strengthening health systems in all countries, and harmonisation of healthcare policies is key.

UHC is a critical component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve this requires the following:

- A multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder alignment and engagement of different sectors.
- Harmonisation and alignment of policies, strategies, legal frameworks, and accountability mechanisms.
- Strong collaboration and co-ordination in governance platforms
- Adequate budgeting, monitoring and evaluation tools.

“Health is not a cost it is an investment”

Dr Karim Bendhaou
MERCK Group and Chair of the
Africa Engagement Committee

Country Spotlight

ETHIOPIA



The Ethiopian government has a Planning and Development Commission which plans the strategies of the country and tries to co-ordinate harmonisation of selected inter- and multi-sectoral agendas of which are made up of different health components.

Ethiopia is also conducting policy and strategy scanning to identify the level of health policy harmonisations that need to be done but also what can be done at the implementation level.

Examples of the Multi- and Inter-Sectoral Collaborations in Ethiopia

Ethiopia formed a Multi-sectoral District Transformation Initiative.

- A pilot project, working in one district currently where different ministries have come together to focus on household transformation through an integrated community development approach which has one plan, one budget and one report among government sectors.
- The aim is to align the priorities of the district so that there is an integrated plan of the various sectors involved.

Under this initiative there were several inter-sectoral coordination platforms, one being the **National Nutrition Co-ordination Body**.

- Ethiopia has a very high stunting rate of children under the age of five. To tackle this issue the coordination body launched a National Food and Nutrition Policy.
- Within this policy was a specific programme called the SEQOTA Declaration which aims to end under nutrition through a multi-sectoral approach focusing on those districts that have high stunting rates.

Other examples include programmes such as WASH and more recently using the National Emergency Co-ordination Committee led by the Ministry of Peace to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I hope that this issue of policy, strategy and harmonisation continues to be a strong agenda because it is really critical to achieve the Universal Health Coverage that we are all envisioning, whilst establishing strong legal frameworks, governance, accountability mechanisms, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation tools for a stronger system.”

Dr Lia Tadesse
Minister of Health,
Ethiopia

Challenges of Harmonisation-Ethiopia

- Implementation of the programmes can be an issue when alignment using the multi-sectoral approach can be lost.
 - This was seen in the SEQOTA initiative, a programme committed to eradicating the underlying causes of chronic undernutrition and ending stunting among children under two years by 2030. To address the challenge ministers from all sectors involved were invited on the ground to see the impact of not working together. After this, the approach was changed and innovative implementations and the commitment to work together and build relationships within the cross sectors saw a decline in stunting growth in the various districts.
- Different players or sectors are not at the same level of capacity.
- There are gaps in clarity with regards to the roles of authority and responsibility of the sectors.
- Sometimes this alignment and working together of the sectors is not usually led by someone or a particular sector and we therefore find that the accountability mechanism of what was set out and achieve gets lost and becomes weak→ There is need for a strong accountability mechanism to align to one vision.
- Resource allocation

SEYCHELLES



The Seychelles is an interesting and unique country being one of the smallest countries in Africa. It depends heavily on tourism and fisheries as their main economic pillars.

With a population of around 90,000-100,000 people, the Seychelles has ensured that there is access to some form of healthcare for all its citizens with UHC being available since the late 70's.

“I think it is very important that we set an environment, the ecosystem that will enable us to work in partnership and harmonise health care systems. If we work in isolation we will not be able to achieve it.”

Dr Danny Thomas Louange
Ministry of Health,
Seychelles

The total health expenditure per capita is about 830 USD, about 70% comes from the public sector with the private sector contributing to around 30%.

However, 100% UHC can never be achieved and for Seychelles some of the challenges lie with the **quality of services, procurement of products** because of their economics of scale and **reaching out to the main continent for partnerships.**

To overcome these issues, Seychelles is:

- Working with the Regional WHO offices and headquarters in establishing initiatives to build on, improve and strengthen the health systems.
- Working with SADC, the African Union as well as partnering with individual countries.
 - Being ambassadors of pull procurement especially for the small African state islands→ The Seychelles feels that if done in the African continent rather than buying from Europe, India and China prices will be competitive and quality can be controlled. In addition, this will enhance partnerships and linkages to form within the continent allowing funds to be kept within it.
 - Working on partnerships with regards to registration of medicines and working towards a standard that registration organisations and manufactures can adhere to.

Policy Prioritisation, Harmonisation and Collaboration in Enhancing Women's Health

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has a mission to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. This can be achieved with universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Global and national level policy prioritisation, harmonisation and collaboration amongst governments has seen real

benefits in advancing human rights for women and girls, particularly improving their sexual and reproductive health.

The Gains Made:

- One in three women uses a modern family planning method.
- A woman's risk of dying in pregnancy or childbirth has

“We need to redouble our efforts to integrate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health into UHC policies and programmes, we have the capacity to shape and harmonise health policies, financing delivery and health protection systems to reduce inequalities, strengthen resilience and protect the rights and choices of all women and girls.”

Ms. Beatrice Mutali
Deputy Regional Director,
UNFPA, East and Southern Africa.

dropped from a one in twenty chance in her lifetime to one in fifty-five.

- Many countries have criminalised gender-based violence and outlawed child marriage and female genital mutilation.
- HIV infections have declined by 20% while AIDS related deaths have decreased by 44%.

Despite the progress made there have been several setbacks.

- The East and Southern African Region in particular, has seen.
 - The likelihood of a woman dying to pregnancy or childbirth is twice that of the global average.
 - One in three girls is still getting married by the age of 18
 - Almost one in six women continues to experience gender-based violence
 - All new HIV infections are occurring mostly in countries in this region.
- Covid-19→Has significantly altered the health financing and service delivery landscape as well as the financial

protection with regards to sexual and reproductive health. It has brought to light the various intersecting forms of inequality and altered people's health seeking behaviour.

How to Accelerate the Progress

- Formulate and implement more harmonised evidence based and people centred health policies.
- Have financing, delivery and financial protection mechanisms and arrangements in place.
- Have comprehensive packages for sexual and reproductive health services in UHC policies and programmes.
- Have UHC through primary health care (PHC)→this has been endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for Africa as well as the Global Public Health community.
- Within the UHC and PHC service packages for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) which usually does not have comprehensive information and services pertaining to SRHR, attention should be on providing the following.
 - Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)
 - Postpartum and post abortion family planning as well as long term family planning methods.
 - Referral and treatment for emergency obstetric care as well as prevention and management of obstetric fistula.
 - Comprehensive abortion care
 - Counselling and services for sexual health and well-being including menstrual health.
 - Detection, prevention, and management of gender-based violence and other harmful practices.

By working on the above through global and national policy prioritisation and harmonisation there will be progress towards universal access to SRHR.

General Harmonisation Challenges in Africa

The problem, each state is sovereign, so no one policy can be the mandate of any state. If any plans are made with regards to disease surveillance, early identification, reporting and control for example, it must be based around individual countries and their strengths.

So, the challenges within the African Continent:

- No harmonised policy
- No harmonised trade
- No open market

One State and One Common Agenda

- Each country must have a starting point not an end point.
- Be enabled and supported by continental policies like the African Medicine Agency (AMA), common manufacturing plans and by a common Africa free trade area.
- All these policies should be centred about talking about VAT in Africa→reducing tax inefficiencies.

- Have primary discussions around regulation, common markets, sharing health workers, implementation of the International Health Regulations
- Make sure that these discussions and changes are publicly led and include the private sector as a supplementary service provider.
- Focus on equity→ For example for UHC to work we must firstly look at those that are most vulnerable and look at services like sexual reproductive health so that we can reduce teenage pregnancies, get these girls and

adolescents to school which in turn will mean that in the long term they can fully participate and contribute to the African economy.

- Focus on primary health care and community health services→ look at primary care, a multi-sectoral action approach and community empowerment and engagement.
- Market shaping→ look at the African market and policies around harmonisation which will shape the market.

Building and Maximising on Private Sector Contribution to UHC

Most Countries have a mix of public and private health systems. The private sector is very well positioned to contribute to the UHC and already provides health products, services and innovations to millions of people and communities globally and in some African countries it contributes to 60% of health-related services.

As an example, Ethiopia has seen the importance of having private sector engagement. It has become a strong priority for the country such that it has been elevated as one of the key agendas in both the national development strategy but also within the health policy and health sector strategy.

These engagements can lead to service provision, manufacturing and other areas through direct public-private partnerships and investments.

To achieve the above, policy harmonisation is vital among the sectors, especially so that there is alignment of the investment priorities with the countries frameworks, incentive packages and support systems.

With regards to regional collaborations, there is a strong commitment to establish the Africa Medicines Agency alongside other countries as well as working with the Africa CDC to build a strong regulatory system. This will be the way forward for local manufacturing of pharmaceuticals and vaccines.

The main challenge that the private sector has found is the defragmentation between the public and private sectors. To make Africa **attractive** and **efficient** we need to overcome this challenge.

What can the private sector do:

- Increase engagements with governments and communities and allow for an enabling environment which can foster new partnerships for UHC as well as helping to achieve the 2030 SDGs.

- Have a clear and harmonised regulatory process and strengthening ability where compliance can be monitored→ONE MARKET, ONE REGULATORY SYSTEM.
- Engage with governments to create an ecosystem for trade and employment.
 - For example, the Covid-19 pandemic brought to our attention the need for local manufacturing of vaccines. The private sector in collaboration with public sectors are ready to work on this whereby countries in Africa are not reliant on procurement of vaccines from abroad but rather can access affordable and available vaccines at their doorstep.
 - The private sector can help governments in training and capacity building and increasing employment.
 - Can help governments create incentives for the local supply chain.

“The private sector is a key player and big partner in policy harmonisation. We can provide additional pool of skills and resources, advance research and development to foster innovations and expand access and reach to quality essential and specialised health services.”



Dr Amit N. Thakker
Executive Chairman,
Africa Health Business

Conclusion

Policy harmonisation for the African continent is critical and can only be achieved if there is collaboration and understanding between the public and private sectors. It will allow for streamlined regulatory systems to be put in place so that more products are approved efficiently while ensuring quality within the continent. Governments will be able to embrace innovation to scale up public health, have nature and nurture of culture accountability around commitments to UHC and ensure innovation is scaled up and harnessed. It will allow the continent to ensure adequate investments for research and development are made for appropriate health products and technologies to meet the needs of the continent. We must be ONE continent with ONE common agenda.

“We need to overcome geopolitical competition to meet and make sure that we have a plan with a manufacturing house across the continent that is agreed to with a demand and supply plan. That is how we are going to succeed with Africa manufacturing, not every country trying to compete with each other but have a joint plan for manufacturing hubs that serve the continent with of course the enabling policy environment.”

Dr Githinji Gitahi
CEO,
Amref Health Africa



We are a boutique consulting and advisory firm that aims to improve access to equitable healthcare in Africa.


Through a private sector lens, we provide organisations with actionable insights to grow their health agenda in Africa.

We advise some of the largest institutions, companies and investors on the African continent, helping them to manage challenging relationships with demanding and critical stakeholders and understand complex market dynamics.

Our team of specialists provides a range of strategically blended services.

- Business Intelligence
- Capacity Building
- Platform Design and Implementation
- Stakeholder convener
- Investment Advisory
- Africa Health Business Symposium (AHBS)

This report from Africa Health Business is a product of Africa Health Business Limited. Copyright © 2021 Africa Health Business Limited. All rights reserved.

 +254 704 838 150

 info@ahb.co.ke

 www.ahb.co.ke

 [AfricaHealthBiz](https://www.facebook.com/AfricaHealthBiz)

 [@AfricaHealthBiz](https://twitter.com/AfricaHealthBiz)

 [Africa Health Business](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Africa-Health-Business)



AHB
AFRICA HEALTH BUSINESS