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**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE
FRAMEWORK FOR STRENGTHENING THE USE OF EVIDENCE, INFORMATION AND
RESEARCH FOR POLICY-MAKING IN THE AFRICAN REGION**

Information Document

CONTENTS

Paragraphs

BACKGROUND	1–3
PROGRESS MADE/ACTIONS TAKEN.....	4–9
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES	10
NEXT STEPS	11–13

BACKGROUND

1. The World report on knowledge for better health¹ and the African regional research for health strategy² emphasized the importance of using research outcomes to inform the development and implementation of health policies and practices to ensure good health outcomes in the Region. To this effect, the Seventy-first session of the Regional Committee for Africa adopted the Framework for strengthening the use of evidence, information and research for policy-making in the African Region (AFR/RC71/13)³ in 2021. The Framework highlights the guiding principles and priority interventions for strengthening the use of research evidence and information for health policy-making in the Region.
2. The Framework stipulates that by the end of 2024; at least 50% of Member States should have established and funded evidence-informed policy networks (EVIPNets) or other knowledge translation platforms; at least 50% of Member States should have achieved a national health research barometer performance of over 66%; at least 50% of Member States should be able to demonstrate evidence of research and databases for policy direction; and at least 50% of Member States should show a health information system performance of over 80%.
3. This first report summarizes the progress made in implementing the Framework from 2021 to date.

PROGRESS MADE/ACTIONS TAKEN

4. Following the adoption of the Framework in 2021, three sensitization webinars were held to promote the establishment of knowledge translation platforms such as the Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) in the Region. There was also a Global Evidence-to-Policy Summit in November 2021, where the WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFRO) held a side event with Member States of the African Region to promote evidence-driven health policy-making.
5. As of 2023, twenty-seven Member States (58%) had established at least one kind of knowledge translation platform and of these, 13 (28%) Member States had established EVIPNets.
6. From 2018 to 2023, the Region recorded a 38% increase in the number of countries with functional web-based and open-access national health observatories (NHOs). These observatories collect information on ongoing health and eHealth programmes to achieve universal health coverage.⁴ The information from the NHOs is consolidated into the integrated African Health Observatory⁵ (iAHO) platform which gives priority to data analytics, research evidence and evidence syntheses as tools for addressing regional health needs. Currently, 41 out of the 47 Member States of the African

¹ WHO. World Report on knowledge for better health. Strengthening health systems. Geneva 2004 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/43058>, accessed 4 April 2024)

² AFR/RC65/6. Research for Health: A Strategy for the African Region, 2016-2025 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/345395>, accessed 4 April 2024).

³ Framework for Strengthening the use of Evidence, Information and Research for Policy-Making in the African Region (AFR/RC71/13) (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/345395>, accessed 6 February 2024)

⁴ Examples of the data collected include maternal and neonatal mortality, health worker density, total health expenditure, out-of-pocket expenditure and service availability

⁵ WHO 2018. The African Health Observatory. (<http://www.aho.afro.who.int/>, accessed 6 February 2024).

Region have commenced the process of establishing their national health observatories,⁶ compared to 23 out of 47 in 2022.⁷

7. As of 2022, sixty-nine per cent of Member States had aligned their research and development coordination mechanisms to ensure the production and use of research findings,⁸ while the average barometer score of regional health research systems increased from 62% in 2018 to 73% in 2022.⁹

8. Several scientific councils and advisory committees were also established¹⁰ to support Member States' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in timely availability of context-specific COVID-19 pandemic information.¹¹ This also translated into more evidence-informed health policies and reinforcement of routine health information system performance using information and communications technology (ICT).¹² The timeliness and completeness of reporting of health information management systems also improved.¹³

9. Fifty-three per cent (53%) of Member States instituted stakeholder engagement processes on eHealth,¹⁴ with all Member States deploying digital health tools to scale up COVID-19 health information management and awareness creation. Of note was the use of mobile phones for sharing epidemiological surveillance information, capacity building and generation of evidence for policy-making as a result of increased investments in reliable ICT infrastructure.¹⁵

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

10. The key challenges which constrained the implementation of the Framework include vertical national knowledge generation and translation platforms; insufficient domestic funding for health research resulting in donor dependency; fragmented coordination of research institutes and systems; and low utilization of eHealth platforms and evidence for policy formulation.

⁶ Except for Botswana, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea- Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe

⁷ AFR/RC72/INF.DOC/8: Progress report on the African Health Observatory, Seventy-second session of the Regional Committee for Africa. Lomé, Republic of Togo, 22–26 August 2022

⁸ Assessing National Health Research Systems in the WHO African Region. 2021 Survey Report (<https://ash.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Assessing-National-Health-Research-Systems-in-the-WHO-African-Region.pdf>, accessed 6 February 2024).

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ WHO/SCI/RFH/2021.08 World Health Organization 2021 Together on the road to evidence-informed decision-making for health in the post-pandemic era: a call for action

¹¹ Fekadu ST, et al. Public health emergency operations centres in Africa: a cross-sectional study assessing the implementation status of core components and areas for improvement, December 2021. *BMJ Open* 2023;13:e068934. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-068934

¹² Progress report on utilizing eHealth solutions to improve national health systems in the African Region: information document (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/372400>, accessed 4 April 2024)

¹³ Evidence as a catalyst for policy and societal change: towards more equitable, resilient and sustainable global health. Meeting report of the WHO Global Evidence-to-Policy Summit, 15–17 November 2021 World Health Organization 2022

¹⁴ Progress report on utilizing eHealth solutions to improve national health systems in the African Region: information document (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/372400>, accessed 4 April 2024)

¹⁵ WHO/AFRO. Health Information and Knowledge Management: eHealth – leveraging IT to strengthen country health systems. (<https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/health-information-and-knowledge-management>, accessed 6 February 2024)

NEXT STEPS

11. Member States should:

- (a) integrate and monitor the use of data for policy-making by ensuring linkages between research findings and policy development;
- (b) institutionalize knowledge generation and translation platforms within the public sector;
- (c) provide sustainable domestic funding for knowledge generation and translation;
- (d) establish mechanisms for knowledge generation, translation, and integration of eHealth platforms;
- (e) sustain the gains made in the use of evidence during the COVID-19 pandemic through collaborative knowledge management.

12. WHO and partners should:

- (a) provide technical and operational guidance to Member States on how to utilize research evidence and information to develop policies for improving health systems performance;
- (b) build the capacity of Members States on knowledge translation;
- (c) work with research and academic institutions to establish knowledge translation platforms;
- (d) promote knowledge translation within government systems;
- (e) provide a coordination system for all other knowledge translation platforms existing outside government systems.

13. The Regional Committee is invited to note the report.