

Report on NHOs Webinar with WHO/AFRO Member States – September 2023

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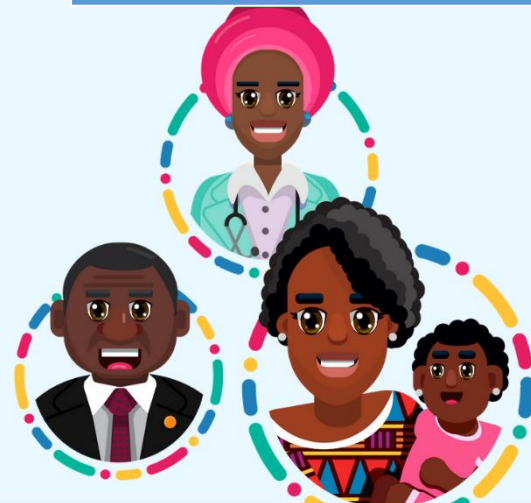
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DAK Team of the ARD Cluster

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Background

The integrated African Health Observatory (iAHO) is a strategic health intelligence platform encompassing the Regional AHO and the National Health Observatories (NHOs) from all 47 Member States within the WHO African Region. Its primary role revolves around being a knowledge management tool with several key functions. These include collecting standardized data through marshalling, generating and presenting crucial information via in-depth analysis and synthesis, promoting cross-country exchanges through networking, and disseminating information via its web platform.

The Observatory's architecture is constructed upon three foundational pillars of health information: data and statistics, analytics, and knowledge and evidence. This structure grants a comprehensive real-time overview of developments within the health sector, offering insights into the ongoing progress of population health throughout the Region. The African Health Observatory drives forward conversations on effective strategies, optimal resource allocation, and innovative solutions for improved health outcomes by convening stakeholders, policymakers, and experts. It lays the groundwork for cohesive and concerted efforts towards attaining universal health coverage, health equity, and sustainable development on the African continent.

In some countries in the Region, the National Health Observatory (NHO) has earned a positive and proactive response, whereas in other countries, the reaction has been more gradual. As a result, the iAHO team planned a webinar involving Member States. The webinar facilitated a comprehensive dialogue concerning the observatory's progress with an open discussion regarding the obstacles encountered by various countries and collaborative exploration of viable solutions.

Objectives of the Webinar

The overall objective of the webinar was to discuss with countries the progress of the National Health Observatory.

The specific objectives included:

- Discuss with countries on the status of the NHO.
- Discuss challenges, best practices, and potential improvements to ensure reliable and timely health data, analytics, and knowledge.
- Identify Capacity Building needs.
- Discuss training programs, technical assistance, and funding opportunities for NHO institutionalization.

Methodology

The methodologies employed during the National Health Observatory webinar encompass a range of approaches designed to facilitate productive discussions and meaningful exchanges among participants. These methodologies consist of open and structured discussions, allowing participants to share their insights and perspectives. Furthermore, the meeting encourages constructive dialogue, allowing for a deeper exploration of ideas and challenges. It also integrates the sharing of successful experiences from other countries, offering valuable insights and inspiring potential solutions. The webinar created a comprehensive and collaborative session by utilizing this combination of methodologies.

Participants

The webinar welcomed diverse participants, culminating in 100, including representatives from WHO country offices, Ministry of Health (MoH) NHO focal points from AFRO Member States, and individuals who expressed interest in joining. The inclusive nature of the event made it accessible to a wide audience, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and experiences among experts and enthusiasts alike.

Results

The webinar took place as scheduled on the 21st of September, starting from 11:20 in the morning until 13:00 noon. To begin with, participants were provided with housekeeping guidelines, explaining how they could seek technical assistance if they encountered any issues and how participants could connect in their preferred language comfortably. Additionally, participants were informed that the webinar was recorded, and their participation implied consent to be recorded.

Over a Decade of Evolution of the National Health Observatories: The AFRO Presentation

The first presentation was from the AFRO side, where they had the opportunity to discuss "National Health Observatories in Africa: Over a Decade of Evolution – Lessons Learned, Challenges, priorities and prospects". The concept of "health observatory" gained global popularity in the mid-1970s, initially adopted in France (1974) and subsequently in Belgium, Italy, and England (Liverpool, 1990). In Africa, the African Health Observatory (AHO) was established in 2010 following the Ouagadougou and Algiers Declarations in 2008. In 2012, WHO supported Member States in creating National Health Observatories (NHOs).

Currently, 41 countries are developing their NHOs through the iAHO, with some in the establishment stage, others in the appropriation stage, and some in the institutionalization stage. iAHO has evolved into a regional resource for health information and expertise, promoting collaboration and evidence-based decision-making. Challenges include the absence of dedicated governance structures for NHOs in many countries, role confusion with routine Health Information Systems (HIS), weak data governance, limited collaboration with data producers, low knowledge generation capacity, and a lack of institutional policy dialogue mechanisms for evidence sharing.



National Health Observatory Journey

i. Mozambique NHO Journey

In the second presentation, Dr. Tatiana Mfulo, Head of the Central Department of the Technical Secretariat of Mozambique's National Health Observatory (NHO), detailed the NHO's journey with key milestones from 2017 to 2021, emphasizing efforts in structuring the Technical Secretariat, creating online platforms, and disseminating reports. The Mozambique NHO experience underscores essential lessons such as the need for dedicated staff, capacity building, and effective information dissemination. A well-defined organizational structure with multi-level involvement, ensuring data access and quality, fostering Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) for data sharing, and promoting multisectoral Technical Working Groups (TWGs) are crucial elements in establishing and maintaining a robust NHO.

ii. Burkina Faso NHO Journey

In the third presentation, focusing on Burkina Faso's experience, Dr. Hermann Badolo highlighted the official launch of their National Health Observatory in July 2019, which began before its formal establishment. They faced challenges such as potential leadership conflicts, competency disputes, limited collaboration within the Ministry of Health, and difficulties securing financial resources and collecting data.

The NHO's missions involve strengthening the government's response to health issues, managing population health and healthcare facilities data, and ensuring reliable health information. Lessons learned include the unmet need for health information products and the growing demand for data analysis, particularly among peripheral actors. Future steps include networking with national observatories, international collaborations, advocacy for capacity building, setting up a scientific committee, sharing health information across healthcare levels, and establishing a data management platform for research projects.

iii. Zambia NHO Journey

The last presentation was from Zambia, where Sandra Sakala, The Deputy Director of the National Health Research Authority, highlighted that The Zambia National Health Observatory (ZNHO), operating under the National Health Research Authority's (NHRAs) Knowledge Translation functions, has established both institutional and functional structures. It aligns with national health information and research data goals, serving as a central repository for previously isolated program data and research evidence.

Although it is yet to be officially launched, ZNHO has been introduced to various stakeholders and forums. Challenges include delays due to funding constraints, lack of dedicated staff, slow indicator determination, and stakeholder buy-in. The platform's resources should be searchable externally to enhance flexibility and integration into other health management information systems. ZNHO has a governance structure, planned quarterly data updates, and a small budget allocation starting in 2024. Partnerships with organisations like CHAI and strong relations with WHO Country and AFRO offices are crucial. Stakeholder engagement, realistic goal setting, government commitment, and investment case development are key strategies for success.

Recommendations

- Organize regular webinars since it's an opportunity for Member States to understand the steps successful countries have gone through.

- AFRO should continue advocacy for the institutionalization of NHO at the country level.
- Use NHO as a knowledge brokering platform for policy dialogue bringing together different stakeholders to generate and discuss evidence.
- Connect NHO work with the country's priorities.

