
African Region

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**EIGHTH PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
TRANSFORMATION AGENDA OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
SECRETARIAT IN THE AFRICAN REGION**

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BACKGROUND

1. The Transformation Agenda of the World Health Organization in the African Region was initiated in 2015¹ to convey the Regional Director's vision for change and serve as a vehicle for implementing health sector reform. It informs and constitutes a vital component of the broader reform agenda aimed at transforming WHO at all levels into an organization capable of delivering global health improvements.
2. Over the past eight years, the WHO Secretariat in the African Region has made significant progress in delivering high-quality results and improving health in the Region by transforming its organizational culture, programmes and operations, with staff at the centre of change. The transformation process has enhanced accountability, efficiency and responsiveness to the needs of Member States.
3. The eighth progress report on the Transformation Agenda to the Regional Committee covering July 2022–June 2023 reviews the status of implementation and achievements across its four focus areas: pro-results values, smart technical focus, responsive strategic operations, and effective partnerships and communications. It also highlights implementation challenges and the next steps towards institutionalizing and sustaining change.

PROGRESS MADE/ACTIONS TAKEN

Pro-results values – consolidating the best practices of the Transformation Agenda to institutionalize and sustain change

4. In the reporting period, AFRO strengthened its commitment to embracing WHO values and upholding the highest ethical standards through developing and implementing a concrete strategy for prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PRSEAH). Since 2021, a total of 253 training sessions have been organized with staff and 1021 sessions with communities, leading to growing awareness and meaningful conversations on the problem. The efforts to mainstream diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as PRSEAH into AFRO processes and staff well-being, will undoubtedly contribute to the expected shift in attitudes towards these issues.
5. AFRO's Pathways to Leadership for Health Transformation Programme was extended to other regions and ministries of health. This intensive, three-month training programme strengthens leadership skills for teamwork, communication and coaching, enabling the trainees to create a leadership vision aligned with WHO or ministries of health values. A cohort of 20 senior staff from the European Region, a joint AFRO/EURO cohort of 23 senior staff, and a joint AFRO/EURO cohort of 20 WHO Representatives (WRs) and staff on the WR roster were trained. Benin launched its first cohort of directors, and Ghana devoted its fourth cohort to women.
6. The AFRO Team Performance Programme and the AFRO Mentorship Programme have been incorporated into staff development and learning activities through an approach that emphasizes the need to streamline and integrate training through a one-tool, one-concept and one-mentor strategy. This year, the mentorship programme launched its fourth cohort, with 99 mentees and 37 mentors. To consolidate awareness and a culture of feedback among managers, a second round of 360-degree

¹ WHO. 2015. [The Africa Health Transformation Programme 2015-2020: A vision for universal health coverage](https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2017-06/full%20repoty.pdf). WHO Regional Office for Africa (<https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2017-06/full%20repoty.pdf>), accessed 6 March 2023).

feedback was conducted among WHO country representatives and operations officers. Eleven Regional Office units and three countries conducted the team performance feedback sessions to identify ways and means of consolidating change achievements.

7. AFRO is promoting the involvement of women in leadership roles through its *Women in Leadership Speaker Series*, which allows women to interact with female leaders in global development and to acquire the skills to handle professional and other challenges. Three sessions have been conducted to provide support for addressing leadership challenges in delivering WHO technical support to Member States. This initiative is a response to the appeal for WHO to play a significant role in empowering women at the country, regional and global levels. As a sign of its growing impact and relevance, WHO Ghana, at the country level, has organized an all-female cohort for the leadership programme, to enhance the leadership skills of women in the health sector and to align its actions with the agenda of the Ministry of Health to allocate 60% of leadership training opportunities to women.

8. Within WHO, good transformation practices are shared through meetings and communication, and cross-functional teams are created to bring together staff from different departments and locations to share perspectives, skills and experiences. As a member of several of these teams and with representation in the Global Transformation Team, including the high-level task force on the implementation of the recommendations of the 2022 Global Management Meeting, AFRO was able to share some of its successful experiences, including the functional review of country offices, change management, and the use of key performance indicators. These innovative corporate and management practices have influenced the global transformation and are being replicated across the Organization, while AFRO has gone on to provide leadership training for staff from other WHO regions.

Smart technical focus — increasing investments toward improving WHO capacity at the country level

9. The Secretariat strengthens its technical support to Member States by investing in human capital and resources. Over the reporting period, AFRO consolidated and scaled up the technical support provided by the 11 multicountry assignment teams (MCATs) to the Member States of the Region. Subject matter experts make up more than 95 % of the MCATs, and their impact is already being felt on the ground. Additionally, AFRO conducted more than 300 training sessions for its staff and Member States and introduced modern technologies to facilitate communication. Regular visits and assessments are conducted to identify the needs of each Member State and ensure that the technical support provided is relevant and effective.

10. AFRO has recorded how country offices, in collaboration with partners, continue to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic in West and Central Africa and monitor the antiretroviral treatment coverage in the Region. Although several countries in West and Central Africa² have achieved 90% coverage for antiretroviral treatment, challenges, including insufficient political commitment, health system weaknesses and health crises such as COVID-19 and Ebola, have hindered progress in the control of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Considering the importance of documenting progress to sustain the goal of ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Region, the Secretariat has been documenting the progress and effort of Member States.

11. As part of its smart technical focus, the Secretariat has established three flagship programmes, namely Promoting Resilience of Systems for Emergencies (PROSE), Transforming Africa's

² Notably Burundi, Cabo Verde, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sao Tome and Principe.

Surveillance System (TASS), and Strengthening and Utilizing Response Groups for Emergencies (SURGE), to respond to emergencies. Within the reporting period, seven dedicated national emergency response teams were trained on different emergency response modules and equipped with the necessary resources and technology to respond to emergencies.³ This enabled them to respond in a timely and effective manner to the emergency outbreaks of Rift Valley fever in Mauritania, polio in Botswana, cholera in Niger and meningitis in Togo. In addition, AFRO conducted risk assessments and contingency planning exercises in 19 countries⁴ in anticipation of and preparation for potential emergencies.

12. In October 2022, AFRO launched the Mwele Malecela Mentorship Programme for Women in Neglected Tropical Diseases to strengthen the professional growth of individuals in the field of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). The programme provides mentees with the opportunity to work with experienced mentors and receive guidance, advice and support in their careers for skills development, exposure to new ideas and perspectives, and relationship building within the NTD community. The overarching goal is to provide them with the resources and support they need to succeed in their careers, become influential leaders and make a positive impact in the prevention and control of NTDs in Africa.

13. Over the last year, AFRO initiated a documentation and communication initiative for its transformation activities to promote accountability and learning, monitor progress and enhance knowledge management. The ongoing assessment of the adolescent health and universal health coverage (UHC) flagship programmes aims to identify good practices in improving the health of adolescents and fostering UHC. Analyses are being conducted to contribute to knowledge in the area of institutional change and showcase the outcomes and impact of the Transformation Agenda in the Region.

Responsive strategic operations

14. As part of efforts to effectively consolidate the change initiated under the Transformation Agenda, AFRO is fostering stakeholder feedback to teams in six dimensions: WHO values; effectiveness; quality; cost consciousness; agility and change management; and collaboration. The objective is to enhance team effectiveness by highlighting strengths and growth areas, improving communication through constructive comments and increasing motivation and engagement. Such feedback allows teams to fully understand where they stand in terms of implementing change, locating transformation challenges and focusing on the most impactful actions. Twelve units and two clusters in the Regional Office and four WHO country offices (Benin, Sao Tome, Algeria, and South Sudan) are using the lessons learnt from the feedback to tackle collective performance challenges.

15. The COVID-19 pandemic presented a critical challenge for AFRO, but it also served as a catalyst for promoting mental health and fostering a healthy work environment. The Organization took decisive action to support its staff and their dependants by providing counselling and psychological services and introducing collaboration tools to facilitate hybrid meetings. These measures not only improved staff productivity but also permitted greater flexibility in work arrangements.

³ Botswana, Congo, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda and Togo.

⁴ Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

16. To address COVID-19 pandemic-related needs, AFRO established clinical sites for testing and vaccination against the disease. This resulted in improved follow-up, management and medical care for patients and the provision of PCR testing equipment and kits. The convenient locations of the vaccination sites resulted in high levels of staff vaccination coverage, reaching over 95% by 2022. These efforts demonstrate AFRO's commitment to promoting the health and well-being of its staff and the importance of a healthy work environment in fostering mental health and productivity.

17. AFRO's prioritization of internal accountability and ensuring that health interventions provide value for money continued over the reporting period. The introduction of the mid-term review tool and the definition of clear performance metrics and goals for health interventions, as well as the regular monitoring and evaluation of progress against these metrics, were some of the actions in this vein. AFRO's robust financial management systems and processes, including budgeting, forecasting and reporting, ensure that resources are allocated and used effectively. Risk, compliance, administrative reviews and internal audits were conducted in 14 countries to promote a culture of transparency and accountability and ensure compliance with policies and procedures. Furthermore, a follow-up of the 14 internal and four external audit report recommendations of the previous year corroborated the implementation of appropriate actions to address the identified issues and internal control gaps. Risk management briefings and training sessions for multiple and targeted budget centre personnel to strengthen and create a regional risk culture complemented the assurance activities conducted in 26 budget centres.

Effective partnerships and communications

18. As part of its concerted efforts to enhance accountability and transparency in its communication with donor partners, AFRO shared donor-focused communication products across various external platforms, including social media and the AFRO website, in 2022. A total of 24 donors were acknowledged, and close to 250 communication products were published, including human interest stories, press releases and videos, as well as posts on Facebook and Twitter. These efforts reached a broad audience of over 6 million people, including donors and partners, the media and the general public.

19. To further enhance its external relations drive, AFRO recruited eight external relations officers. These professionals leveraged their expertise to identify funding opportunities and develop proposals aligned with the needs of Member States. The increased focus on strengthening accountability and reinforcing trust with donor partners has helped to further AFRO's mission and improve outcomes for the communities it serves.

20. In 2022, AFRO introduced regular reporting and feedback mechanisms and organized over 60 partner briefings to foster a better understanding of, and collaboration in its work. These efforts led to the mobilization of new funding at the country level, totalling US\$ 422 million. AFRO also increased collaboration with non-State actors, signing 112 agreements worth over US\$ 60 million for efficient strategy implementation. Partnerships were forged with civil society organizations and NGOs to reach the most vulnerable and remote populations, especially in emergency situations.

21. To sustain leadership development among managers in ministries, AFRO is partnering with academic institutions such as Ashesi University in Ghana and the University of Pretoria in South Africa to expand its impact and preserve the Leadership for Health Transformation Programme's ambition. Additionally, AFRO increased collaboration with other United Nations agencies, engaging in 31

agreements or joint programmes for synergistic actions and leveraging each agency's comparative advantage.

22. AFRO bolstered its external communication through the significant improvement of its online presence and brand image. It revamped its website with new theme-focused pages to diversify content. The more than 9 million page visits in 2022 fell slightly short of the 2021 levels owing to the waning public interest in COVID-19 information, but the average time spent on the website increased by 27% following the introduction of new pages on other health topics. Additionally, AFRO increased its social media presence and engagement, allowing it to reach an audience of over 150 million through 29 media campaigns and to better connect with its stakeholders and partners. AFRO also launched a micro-website on the achievements of the Transformation Agenda.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

23. Despite reporting significant transformation progress, the African Region continues to face challenges in assessing the impact of its initiatives owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Programme implementation and monitoring have been limited, leading to delays in achieving transformation at the country level. To address these challenges, AFRO is adapting its methods to become more agile and providing resources and support to country offices. AFRO is closely collaborating with country offices to align with the new reality and ensure the delivery of expected results while also ensuring the continuity of services and enhancing communication and collaboration.

NEXT STEPS

24. The WHO Secretariat in the African Region will shift its focus on impact and:
- (a) institutionalize proven practices from the four focus areas of the Transformation Agenda and establish effective methods to maintain, expand and institutionalize efforts to optimize the transformation gains;
 - (b) continue to enhance staff engagement, support staff well-being, and drive progress on diversity, equity and inclusion to sustain the equitable, values-based culture;
 - (c) continue aligning with global and regional transformation efforts to improve consistency and speed up the transformation process at the country level;
 - (d) utilize the lessons learnt over the past eight years to establish AFRO's knowledge base on transformation, optimize efficiency and promote learning within and outside WHO;
 - (e) document successes and lessons learnt to demonstrate the impact, cost-effectiveness and links of the Transformation Agenda with health system strengthening to increase accountability for transformation beyond WHO.
25. The Regional Committee is invited to note the report and endorse the proposed next steps.