

Africa Women's Health

The role of the private sector in advancing women's health in Africa

Nairobi, Kenya,
Hybrid Full Day Event
24th February 2022



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Executive Summary



H.E. Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady of Kenya giving the keynote address

Women are the pillars of our families and communities, yet they remain disadvantaged in access to quality, affordable healthcare despite advances in health policy and implementation under Universal Health Coverage (UHC) frameworks in Africa.

In the opening ceremony distinguished leaders from the government, development partners and private sector set the stage for vibrant discussions on women's health by outlining how we can create an enabling environment for advancing women's health in Africa. The leaders called for a bold vision, collective investment, and a sense of urgency in implementing tailor-made policies for women's health on the continent.

Reducing the Cancer Threat

As of 2020, almost half of Africa's cancer burden was attributable to female reproductive cancers. Breast cancer accounting for 28% and cervical

cancer for 20% of cancers on the continent. Screening for these cancers is invasive and technology dependent; making it expensive for Africa's healthcare system to manage.

The high cancer burden is driven by (amongst others):

- A low level of awareness.
- Inequitable access to screening, detection and treatment services.
- Inadequate financial and human resources for care.

Data from the Global Women's Health Index (GWHI) has shown us that only about 11% of African women surveyed, have ever had any type of screening for cancer with no African country reporting more than 30% of women having ever been screened for cancer.

Limited public health spending power for human resources and equipment that underpins the low screening rates also translates to a low spending power for treatment modalities needed for these cancers. To overcome the burden of the rising threat of cancer in women, focus should be on increasing awareness of signs and symptoms



Hon. Anifa Bangirana, Minister of State for Health, Ministry of Health-Uganda



Honourable Ministers and dignitaries at the closing ceremony



Mr. Mugo Kibati, Chairman, Kenya Biovax Institute



Hon. Dr. Adeleke Mamora Olorunnimbe, Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Health-Nigeria



Dr. Ahmed Ogwell, Deputy Director, Africa CDC



Ms. Flora Mutahi, Board Chair, Kenya Private Sector Alliance

of cancer among communities and increasing screening, diagnostic and treatment facilities.

Furthermore, to build strong health systems, we need to increase the capacity of trained healthcare providers, have a decentralized system where patients are able to access care close to their homes and where they can continue their care and treatment.

There needs to be appropriate standards of care and treatment guidelines which can be followed and have policies that support end-to-end cancer care management which is affordable and accessible with the support of UHC.

To achieve the above, collaboration between the public and private sector is vital. Only that way, the existing gaps in access to screening, diagnosis and care can be bridged so as to enable an integrated health system.

Cancer care must be embedded within UHC frameworks and as a continent Africa must leverage its prolific digital innovations to: provide information; education; and financing for sustainable cancer care whilst transforming policy into action.

Women's Empowerment through RMNCH

Women's empowerment has a strong potential to promote sustainable development.

Empowering women through reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health (RMNCH) means integrating service delivery for mothers and children from pre-pregnancy to delivery; the immediate postnatal period and childhood.

About 300,000 women die due to pregnancy related causes every year. 74% die from complications during delivery, which implies that Africa needs to pay special attention to RMNCH.

The major challenges faced by women when accessing the RMNCH services include:

- Lack of quality health care and inadequate availability of medication.
- Lack of finances when accessing the services.
- Limited healthcare workers; especially in marginalized and rural areas.
- Unmet implemented strategies to support the delivery of RMNCH services.

The accessibility of RMNCH services can be improved through:

- Enhancing quality healthcare by introducing digital health; where women can access the RMNCH services without the need to frequently visit the healthcare facilities.
- Leveraging the power of the private sector to make products and services more accessible.



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Hon. Dr. Michel Hamala Sidibe, Special Envoy for the Africa Medicines Agency (AMA), African Union



Hon. Ali Hassan Mohammed, Minister for Health Development, Ministry of Health-Somaliland

- Working on the issues around health insurance and UHC.
- Increasing the capacity of trained health providers to deliver services and support an enabling service provision environment.

Empowering women by meeting all their healthcare needs is a goal on its own; Africa should act to improve the women's conditions, and this can start by improving the access and quality to RMNCH services.

UHC: Improving Health and Well-being in Africa

As governments across the continent strive towards providing equitable access to healthcare amid the “double burden” of disease. It is vital that all sectors work together to accelerate solutions that strengthen health systems to respond to the public health crises and continue to provide quality and affordable healthcare under UHC.

Effective interventions to address diseases require a life course approach where health is considered from preconception through adolescence and adulthood. To achieve this, women's holistic health must be prioritised.

Many governments have set ambitious targets towards improving health indicators by initiating UHC.

Well organized planning and implementation of UHC is therefore crucial and requires a holistic view and expertise: This is where Public- Private Partnerships (PPPs) can be highly beneficial. the public and private sector each bring different but crucial, capabilities and mandates to the forefront: The government act as the regulator, healthcare providers for the vulnerable in the society and public healthcare payers: Whereas the private sector plays a role in supporting governments build and run efficient and viable health systems. This can be done by actively participating towards the entire health chain value, leveraging the experiences in implementing massive projects, relying on a wide range of skills and resources, leveraging on new technologies and innovations and giving budgets and visibility to the governments by transferring the risk and associated volatility at fixed costs.

Leadership in Advancing Women's Health

Leadership, especially leadership in public health, is defined as: *“The ability of an individual to influence, to motivate and to enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of their community and/or the organization in which they work”*. It involves inspiring people to craft and achieve a vision and goal. When recognizing African leaders who are advancing women's health on the continent, we look at the spaces that have seen radical changes in health indicators, in visibility and in positioning of women in Africa.

Champions can be found in all sub-sectors of Africa's healthcare system, that is the private, the public and development sector. Many organizations and individuals are championing women's health on the continent in various forms. Through their innovations and technologies, via increasing capacity building, resource mobilization and changing public policy and frameworks; just to name a few.

African leaders, from both the public and private sector, still have more to do to and PPPs are vital to ensure that the women's health agenda remains at the forefront of the discussion.

As the AHBS VII ended, reflections were made on the discussions surrounding women's health in Africa and how to advance it for generations to come.

A key take home message was that: *“To strengthen and build resilient health systems on the continent PPPs are vital. Leveraging of the strengths of both sectors, learning from each other, and being harmonized is crucial in building and strengthening health systems”*.

Furthermore, as the continent continues to develop, it must leapfrog the digital health infrastructures which can fill some of the gaps of primary healthcare and the needs for Africa. If there is alignment between the public and private sector, strong partnerships can be built. The continent will then be able to handle disease threats that are to come and fill the gaps that are existing in the health systems today. And most importantly: Advance women's health and well-being on the continent.

Africa Men's Health

The Role of the Private Sector in Advancing Men's Health in Africa

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