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Session Report

Technology-enabled Health System Strengthening

Driving resilience in Africa

📅 Thursday, 22nd February 2024

📍 Villa Rosa Kempinski,
Nairobi Kenya

Background

Vantage Health Technologies, a part of BroadReach Group, and Africa Health Business (AHB) partnered to organise an exclusive high-level multi stakeholder roundtable session in Nairobi, Kenya. The event discussions focused on Technology-enabled Health System Strengthening – Driving resilience in Africa.

Strengthening the health system is at the core of the Government of Kenya's Universal Health Coverage (UHC) agenda. Substantial investments have been made by the Government to advance accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare, with a strong focus on equity. Despite these accomplishments, the sector continues to grapple with various challenges, including inadequate funding, limited resources, human resource shortages, rising medical costs alongside low insurance enrolment, and regulatory challenges for products used to manage novel and re-emerging disease. High cost of healthcare remains a major barrier to access, especially for the poor who spend a large share of their household income to meet their healthcare needs. While HIV prevalence, new HIV infections and AIDS related mortality has decreased, the challenge of new infections among key populations and adolescent girls and young women remains. Kenya is among 30 high TB and TB/HIV high burden countries that contribute over 85% of the global TB burden. While TB case-finding improved in FY21/22, a significant proportion (32%) of people with TB are still missed.

The key discussion areas during the session included:

- Advancing Technology Solutions with an emphasis on the utilization of AI-driven, data-centric, and technology-enabled solutions to address healthcare challenges.

- Driving towards achieving UHC by 2030, not only on a global scale but also with a targeted focus on Kenya, ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare.

- Building transformative partnerships that are scalable beyond Kenya to other countries facing similar healthcare challenges.

Executive Summary

The Government of Kenya is implementing various strategies to achieve its UHC goals and the management of its HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria response. It is investing in community health promoters (CHPs), recognizing their important role providing primary healthcare at the local level. The Government is also fostering innovation, research, and digitization targeted at strengthening health systems and improving access to health. Kenya has boosted its investment in digital data management and information technologies to improve data exchange, gathering, analysis, and utilization to support evidence-based decision-making. Key partnerships with the Global Fund, PEPFAR, Africa CDC and other key stakeholders support these efforts. Realizing a complete integrated health information system will require complex analysis of big data to generate insights to inform national health priorities and patient treatment. To attain UHC and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) of AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria eradication by 2030, additional investments and partnerships will be required.

The capacity to make data-driven decisions and quickly share evidence-based insights is critical for an effective health care system. Innovation and 4th industrial revolution technologies – the cloud, big data, and artificial intelligence (AI) – must be properly utilised for better healthcare management and delivery of services, while best utilizing limited resources.

The capacity to make data-driven decisions and quickly share evidence-based insights is critical for an effective health care system

Discussion Topics

The key themes discussed during the roundtable session covered aspects such as policy, capacity building, collaboration, equity, infrastructure, data management, and the operational use of technology in healthcare delivery.

Ecosystem Approach and African-Led Solutions

An ecosystem approach involves considering the entire healthcare landscape, including infrastructure, policies, stakeholders, and community needs, when implementing digital health and AI solutions.

African-led solutions emphasize the importance of local expertise and context-specific innovations tailored to address the unique challenges faced by African healthcare systems.

This approach promotes sustainability and ensures that technologies are effectively integrated into existing healthcare structures.

Government's Role, Policy Framework, and Public Private Partnerships

The government plays an important role in creating an enabling environment through policy formulation and regulation. Policies should address issues such as data security, privacy, interoperability, and equitable access to ensure that digital health and AI initiatives benefit the entire population.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are essential for leveraging the strengths of both sectors to drive innovation, investment, and implementation of digital health solutions.

Capacity Building, Training, and Collaboration

Capacity building initiatives should focus on equipping healthcare providers including Community Health Promoters (CHPs), with the skills needed to effectively utilize digital health tools and AI technologies. Further, collaboration among government agencies, healthcare organizations, NGOs, and technology providers is necessary for sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices in technology-enabled healthcare delivery.

Training programs should emphasize access, awareness, affordability, and sustainability to ensure long-term impact and scalability of digital health interventions.

Interconnected Health Systems, UHC, and Data Integration

Achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) requires a holistic approach that integrates all components of the healthcare system, including digital health solutions, to ensure seamless access to quality care for all. AI can facilitate better connectivity between healthcare payers and providers, leading to improved coordination, efficiency, and patient outcomes. Integration of health data from various sources into a unified platform, such as the Kenya Health Information System (KHIS), is essential for data-driven decision-making and monitoring of population health trends.

Equitable Access, Rural Healthcare, and Infrastructure Improvement

Digital health solutions should be designed to address healthcare disparities and ensure equitable access to services, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Improving infrastructure, including internet connectivity, electricity supply, and healthcare facilities, is vital for enabling the effective deployment of digital health technologies across all regions. Investment in infrastructure should prioritize areas with limited access to healthcare resources to bridge the urban-rural healthcare divide.

Data Management, Security, and Commercialization

Data is a strategic asset that should be managed securely and used for public good, while safeguarding against cyber threats and unauthorized access. Therefore, health data should be protected from commercial exploitation to maintain patient privacy and confidentiality.

Efficient data visualization tools are essential for interpreting and communicating insights derived from health data, facilitating informed decision-making and program sustainability.

Operational Usage of Data and Technology for Disease Diagnosis

While the health sector possesses abundant data, there's a need to enhance its operational usage through AI-driven analytics and decision support systems. AI technologies can improve disease diagnosis and management by analyzing large datasets to identify patterns, predict outcomes, and recommend personalized treatment strategies.

Operational management of data involves optimizing workflows and processes to ensure that actionable insights are generated and utilized effectively by healthcare providers at the point of care.

Key Takeaways

Local Contextualization and Sustainability

It is important to adopt an ecosystem approach and promote African-led solutions in implementing digital health and AI initiatives. This ensures that technologies are tailored to local needs, promoting sustainability and effective integration into existing healthcare structures.

Government Leadership and Collaboration

Government leadership is essential in creating an enabling environment through policy formulation and regulation. Additionally, PPPs are necessary for driving innovation, investment, and implementation of digital health solutions. Collaboration among stakeholders is vital for sharing knowledge and resources to advance technology - enabled healthcare delivery.

Holistic Integration for Equitable Access

Achieving UHC requires a holistic approach that integrates digital health solutions into all components of the healthcare system. This includes improving infrastructure to ensure equitable access to services, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Effective data management, security, and operational usage are critical for informed decision-making and improving patient outcomes.

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Some Key Quotes

"AHB and Vantage Health Technologies have established a transformative partnership to address cross-cutting challenges in the Kenya health system. This partnership looks forward to collaborating with the eco system and showing that AI powered Healthcare technologies can contribute to the building blocks of UHC in Kenya and accelerate its achievement. We strongly believe in forging meaningful public and private partnerships to enable access to good health so all Kenyans can flourish."

Paul Bhuhi
Managing Director
Vantage Health Technologies

"We must embrace an ecosystem approach to facilitate the integration and sustainable adoption of digital health and AI within our existing healthcare infrastructure in Kenya. It's imperative that African-led solutions, driven by African expertise, pave the way for a healthier Africa."

Amit Thakker
Executive Chairman
Africa Health Business (AHB)

"The role of government is to provide an enabling environment where other partners can provide health system strengthening solutions such as digital health and AI. The government is always willing to listen, and emphasis is placed on, when one has a good idea, start and perfection will come along the way."

"Data is a strategic asset that needs to be used for public good. We need to ensure cyber and data security and that health data is protected from undue commercialization."

Bernard Langat
Division Head, Directorate of Health Informatics
Ministry of Health

"We need to know how to sustainably exploit digital space for the benefit of the patient and the healthcare provider. There is an urgent need for AI driven capacity building for Community Health Promoters (CHPs) with a focus on access, awareness, and affordability. The CoG is open to partnerships that will advance health service delivery through technology."

Meboh Abuor
Senior Program Advisor
Council of Governors Kenya (CoG)

"It is impossible to achieve the UHC dream unless all health system building blocks work together cohesively. AI will be critical to improving the connectedness of payers and providers that will have an overall positive impact on the health system."

Gakombe Kanyenje Karangaita
Chairperson
Kenya Healthcare Federation (KHF)

"The conversation on informatics should always be in the room as this will enable technology to be a critical component of health systems."

Tim Theuri
CEO
Kenya Healthcare Federation (KHF)

"Technology should be tailored to help and impact fragile health systems and ensure benefit to the population. There should be an emphasis on seeing impact and sustainability of digital health solutions in the communities of the people who really need it. Efficient data visualization will be important in ensuring program sustainability."

Mohamed Mohamud
Public Health Specialist
Kenya Red Cross Society

"Everybody deserves access to care and one of the ways to ensure this is to make digital innovations more predictive to tackle the low hanging fruits in the health system. Collaborations will be key to move these digital innovations to the next level."

Maureen Nafula
Supply Chain Technical Lead
PharmAccess

"There needs to be improvement of the health system infrastructure to ensure digital technology and AI is of benefit to all - not only to those in urban areas."

Jane Kitonga
Grants Manager
Amref Health Africa

"Collaborations and partnerships are critical to strengthen the ecosystem of digital health and AI. Further, there needs to be discussions on how the Kenyan government can embrace private sector innovations and investments."

Arif Neky
Founding Coordinator
UN SDG Partnership Platform

"To save lives and improve the future, where a person lives should not determine if they get healthcare and hence healthcare solutions, more so digital health solutions, need to be actionable and scalable to all counties in Kenya."

Gathari Ndirangu
Global FP/RH Director
Jhpiego

"The health sector is data-rich, but information synthesis and usage is poor. This needs to be countered by efficient operational management of data whereby clinicians can better carry out disease diagnosis using AI. For example, TB diagnosis has been done well with AI."

Bedan Gichaga
Deputy Director HIV, PROPEL Health Palladium USAID program
Palladium

"There is a need to focus on how implementing partners can help digital health solutions reach the target population. The siloed reporting system also needs to be replaced and there needs to be improvement of human resource capacity within the health system – health workers need to be digitally savvy."

Michael Mugo
Business Development Advisor
PS Kenya

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