

Driving the health agenda in West Africa



The specialised health institution of ECOWAS

The West African Health Organization (WAHO-OOAS) is the specialised health institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It was established 31 years ago on 9 July 1987 by the Heads of Governments & States of the 15 countries in West Africa and tasked to ensure 'the attainment of the highest possible standard and protection of health of the peoples in the sub-region through the harmonisation of the policies of the Member States, pooling of resources, and cooperation with one another and with others for a collective and strategic fight against the health problems of the sub-region'.

How does WAHO work?

To achieve this, WAHO in its capacity as the regional governmental health organisation, partners with many funding and technical support organisations and institutions including USAID, World Bank, African Development Bank, KfW the German Development Bank, Agence Française de Développement, Bill and



WAHO-sponsored 'Nigerian research day on Maternal Newborn and Child Health', Abuja, July 2018

Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), and the International Development Research Centre from Canada. Others include the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), World Health Organisation (WHO), Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), UNAIDS, NEPAD, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), West African Monetary and Economic Union (UEMOA) and the European Union. This list is by no means exhaustive.

The programmes implemented by WAHO are guided by Strategic and Operational Plans. For example, the 2016-2020 WAHO Strategic Plan, has thirteen priority programmes grouped under three strategic goals namely: (i) Promotion of priority health policies and programmes in the region, (ii) Strengthening strategic partnerships for health and (iii) Building the institutional capacity of WAHO. The plan is developed in collaboration with regional stakeholders, particularly the ECOWAS Ministries of Health and financial and technical partners, and is due for review at mid-term this year 2018. This review will also provide the opportunity to align the plan with the new vision as approved by the Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS in Banjul this year.



Assembly of ECOWAS Health Ministers, Banjul, June 2018

WAHO's key achievements



Motorbikes donated to Ghana's MoH

WAHO-OOAS has been at the forefront of developing, championing and promoting regional health improvement policies and strategies and undertaking activities geared towards improving the health of the nearly 340 million people in West Africa. These citizens have WAHO and its partners to thank for many key public health developments:

- Coordination of regional efforts to tackle the Ebola crisis of 2014, including deployment of 115 health officers to the affected countries, provision of 14 ambulances, 19 pick-up trucks and other equipment and materials.
- Establishment of a Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control in Abuja to collate information on epidemics and relevant diseases, support the countries' preparedness for tackling epidemics, monitor the emergence of any epidemic and respond rapidly
- Installation of automatic thermal cameras in several border airports to protect our region from epidemics of haemorrhagic fevers such as Ebola
- Improvement in regional availability of drugs through the storage and warehousing of essential medicines and vaccines.



WAHO day in Togo

Malaria and neglected tropical disease (NTD) transmission are common vulnerabilities in the ECOWAS region particularly across the Sahel region. In response, WAHO formulated the Sahel Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases project with the support of the World Bank. Thanks to this project, WAHO has regularly organised mass treatment campaigns for neglected tropical diseases and seasonal malaria chemotherapy in

some countries. These countries also benefitted from four hydrocele surgery camps, which made it possible to operate on 418 patients with hydrocele.



Eye equipment donated to the Togo MoH

In a region with the highest disease burden, and often prone to recurring epidemic and endemic diseases, ensuring optimal health of the people is a permanent challenge. WAHO is therefore streamlining its actions and scaling up interventions for visible population impact.

Priority themes now include Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health; Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable & Communicable Diseases; Access to High Quality Medicines and Vaccines; Promotion of Quality Standards & Centres of Excellence, and Availability of region-specific Health Information.

WAHO will be continuously guided by its core mandate and leverage on its many comparative advantages to consolidate its leadership role in health in the ECOWAS region.

A message from our DG

From the Director General, Professor Stanley Okolo, to the citizens of West Africa, on 9 July 2018, the 31st anniversary of the establishment of WAHO

Fellow West Africans,

I bring you greetings from the West African Health Organisation, WAHO, the specialised institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for health issues.

Today 9 July 2018, marks the 31st anniversary of the creation of WAHO, and it is a unique opportunity to address you on the great strides we have made together in health in our region and the challenges ahead.

The Heads of State and Government of the 15 countries of ECOWAS established WAHO with the singular objective of ensuring 'the highest possible standard and protection of health of the people in the region through the harmonisation of policies of the Member States, pooling of resources, and cooperation with one another and with others for a collective and strategic combat against the health problems of the sub-region.'

Since that decision was taken, WAHO has recorded a lot of achievements, despite teething challenges. These include:

- Establishing the ECOWAS Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control with Headquarters in Abuja
- Training and upskilling over 1000 health staff
- Harmonising medicines policies across the region
- Improving drugs and vaccines supply chain security
- Establishing a network of National Coordinating Institutions for surveillance and emergency response to epidemics
- Establishing a network of Regional Reference Laboratories
- Publishing a Strategic Document on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in Health in the ECOWAS region
- Publishing a Traditional Medicine Pharmacopeia (Compendium)
- Regularly publishing health information on epidemics
- Regular forum to share best practices in health in the region
- Developing an information database to monitor zoonotic diseases in the context of epidemic diseases using a 'One Health' approach. As a result, data on priority animal diseases will be collected in a regional information sharing platform for the ECOWAS region beginning this year.

In June this year in Banjul, the 19th Ordinary Meeting of the Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS adopted several resolutions to advance the health of the citizens of the Community. Some of these include the Regional Strategic Plan for Mental Health in West Africa, the Regulation for Establishing and Defining Operating Procedures of the ECOWAS Regional Biobank and the Common Technical Documents (CTD) for the Registration of Medicines in the ECOWAS Region. The Assembly also accepted the Banjul Declaration by the



First Ladies of ECOWAS countries on the Elimination of Obstetric Fistula from the region.

These are great achievements by any standards but we must do more. In the coming years we should ensure our actions and interventions are scaled up for visible population impact, particularly in the thematic areas of Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health, Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable & Communicable Diseases, Access to High Quality Medicines & Vaccines, Promotion of Quality Standards & Centres of Excellence, and Availability of region-specific Health Information.

In all interventions, we will tirelessly work to build human capacity in the region, strengthen our networks and ensure sustainability of all health improvement programmes. This is our bold new vision, which was approved last month by the Assembly of ECOWAS Health Ministers, on the recommendation of the Health Experts Committee of ECOWAS.

On the occasion of WAHO's 31st Birthday, I wish to express our profound gratitude to our Development Partners for their continuous and invaluable financial and technical support towards improving public Health in the ECOWAS Region. Indeed, over the past year, they have been very supportive and we are confident that this collaboration on crucial public health issues will continue.

Finally, my appreciation goes to our Heads of Governments and States in the 15 countries of the ECOWAS region for their commitment to the health of the people. I urge them to continue to strive one and all towards a realisation of the April 2001 Abuja Declaration which calls for 15% of all national budgets to be dedicated to health.

Long live WAHO!

Long live Regional Integration Through Better Health!

Statements from partners and users about WAHO's intervention



Working with postgraduate medical colleges to improve human capacity and quality standards in health

1. *'I am impressed by the current quality and efficiency of this institution. Keep it up.'* Jean-Gabriel Ouango, Professor of Medicine, at the Ministry of Secondary and Higher Education of Burkina Faso, during the celebration of WAHO Day on 9 July 2018
2. *'In responding to the disease surveillance needs of the country, WAHO provided capacity building for health staff in the implementation of the West African Regional Disease Surveillance Capacity Strengthening (WARDS) Project in the Central and Upper River Regions.'* Honourable Saffie Lowe-Ceesay, Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Republic of The Gambia the 19th Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS region, in Banjul on 8 June 2018
3. *'The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is very grateful for the incredible support from the West African Health Organisation. Over the last few years, WAHO has taken a more prominent role in the coordination of public health institutes in the West African region. In March 2018, we were grateful to have worked with WAHO to implement the largest outbreak simulation exercise ever, in West Africa.'*

That activity highlighted several recommendations and opportunities to strengthen our disease prevention, detection and response capacity in Nigeria. As proud hosts of the Regional Centre for Disease Control, NCDC looks forward to working even more closely with WAHO to strengthen health security in West Africa, and Africa at large.' Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu, Chief Executive Officer, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control

4. *'I consider the West Africa Health Organization (WAHO) as one of the most important organs of ECOWAS particularly because of the direct correlation between human health, human capital development and wealth of the people.'* Honourable Minister of Health, Federal Republic of Nigeria Prof Isaac F. Adewole, at the opening ceremony of the 18th Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS region, in Abuja, on 16 June 2017
5. *'WAHO remains USAID's main partner in health in the region.'* Alex Deprez, USAID's Mission Director for West Africa, USAID Regional Health Office West Africa Partners' Meeting in Accra, May 2017
6. *'I would like to express my gratitude to WAHO for all the efforts they are making to improve the health of our populations.'* Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health of Burkina Faso at the opening of the workshop on the harmonisation of processes and tools for monitoring and evaluating interventions of the Sahel Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases project in Ouagadougou, on 15 May 2017
7. *'Happy anniversary to WAHO, our institution! May you forge ahead for the welfare of all citizens of ECOWAS.'* Safia Barry, a professional conference interpreter



West African Health Organization
01 BP 153 Bobo-Dioulasso
Burkina Faso

Tel: +20 97 01 00 / (226) 20 97 57 75
Fax: (226) 20 97 57 72

Email: wahooas@wahooas.org
or wahooas@fasonet.bf
Web: w3.wahooas.org
Twitter: [@OoasWaho](https://twitter.com/OoasWaho)
Facebook: [ooaswaho](https://www.facebook.com/ooaswaho)