

# **HRH Governance:**

## **An Essential Ingredient for Enhanced Health Sector Workforces in Africa**



# Health Workforce Governance: An Essential Ingredient for Enhanced Health Sector Workforces in Africa

## Abstract:

Ineffective stewardship and poor governance of HRH undermine the performance of health systems and prevent them from realizing their full potential. Absence of mechanisms to orchestrate the efforts of actors and incentivize/restrain behaviors would result in market failures and perverse incentives that result in duplication, waste, inefficiency, poor quality, inequities and several other issues that undermine health outcomes. However, fostering effective stewardship and promoting good governance generates value for all stakeholders. This policy brief explores **governance** as critical to market performance for HRH. It highlights the importance of identifying policy levers and governance mechanisms available for governments to steer and regulate HRH markets and mitigate market distortions and failures as well as the institutional architecture and checks and balances needed to advance HRH. The brief calls for an initiative to advance Health Workforce Governance in Africa

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## Health Workforce Governance Matters

With bold country level Health Workforce strategic plans<sup>1</sup> and growing political will<sup>2</sup> to expand the numbers of health workers in the 54 countries of Africa, ***why have the gains been modest and fragile?***

Beyond the general call for more financial resources in the health sectors of these countries, leaders from Amref and Health Governance International (HGI) have ***identified a missing ingredient which is a well-designed framework and infrastructure to govern the Health Workforce***. This strengthened governance will not only ensure the scarce resources are better focused and used but will serve to attract more public and private funding flows to address the Health Workforce Crisis.<sup>3</sup>

While the ***“Working for Health 2022-2030 Action Plan”***<sup>4</sup> provides an excellent “roadmap” or “orchestral score” to guide the journey to achieve stronger Health Workforce performance, it lacks a clear description of ***who is accountable for what*** to make it all happen. It is now essential to describe the key roles and responsibilities among different Health Workforce functions and ensure that they are assigned to well-resourced, empowered actors who would be able to realize the full potential of human resources in a country. On top of that it should define how different Health Workforce stakeholders will integrate their efforts through a unified framework that will serve as the “guide” for the journey or the “conductor” to make collective Health Workforce music.

The Africa Union notes that continental cooperation is critical to expand the African public Health Workforce pillar. This pillar is part of the continent’s strategy for achieving ***Agenda 2063 - the Africa We Want***<sup>5</sup>. The African Union Commission on COVID-19 under the guidance and

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<sup>1</sup> See: [The state of strategic plans for the health workforce in Africa - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> See: SEVENTY-FIFTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY, Provisional agenda item 15, A75/15, 12 April 2022

<sup>3</sup> See: “Leadership and Governance for Enhanced HRH Contributions to Health Systems Strengthening Insights. Imperatives. Investments.” 2015, WHO Technical Working Group No. 5, Co-Chairs: Dr. Francis Omaswa, MD Executive Director, African Centre for Global Health and Societal Transformation, Dr. James A. Rice, PhD Project Director USAID Leadership, Management, and Governance Project, Management Sciences for Health

<sup>4</sup> [Working for Health 2022-2030 Action Plan \(who.int\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want: <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations>

Chairmanship of His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa, is doubling down on efforts to ensure an effective and sustainable approach to tackling emerging public health threats. The New Public Health Order forms the foundation for these efforts, and it highlights the critical role of human resources for health as part of the continent's strategy for achieving Agenda 2063 - the Africa We Want. To achieve this the Africa CDC has put in place the Africa Health Workforce Task Team as part of the steps to put the New Public Health Order's proposals into practice.

**More intentional investment** is needed to describe, enable and empower a national level **"Health Workforce Governance Enhancement Plans"** that enable the setting of strategic directions for fit-for-purpose Health Workforce, steers the ecosystem in a way that advances the performance of health systems and engages key Health Workforce stakeholders in a constructive and collaborative manner in Africa. The National Health Workforce Governance Enhancement Plan places the frameworks and structures to better govern the operationalization of and funding for, the human resources for health and fosters collaboration among the many multi-sectoral and multi-professional bodies which are key to Health Workforce success and sustainability.<sup>6</sup> [The Health Workforce Governance Enhancement Plan](#) is a Key Missing Link for Sustained Health Workforce Success.<sup>7</sup>

This Policy Brief intends to make the case for public and private institutions and agencies to mobilize millions of investments for stronger capacity development initiatives for enhanced Health Workforce Governance Structures, Systems, and Skills for the countries within the African Union. Investments that would have a maximal return, as they will refine strategic directions, rationalize use of resources, strengthen accountability, and cultivate a culture of trust and integrity. Good governance for the ecosystem as a whole and for organizations within the system would ensure the

**"Supporting and sustaining political leadership and health system stewardship and governance is the single most critical intervention that holds potential for implementing needed Health Workforce solutions at country and global level"**

*Source: [Looking back to look forward: a review of human resources for health governance in South Africa from 1994 to 2018 - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)*

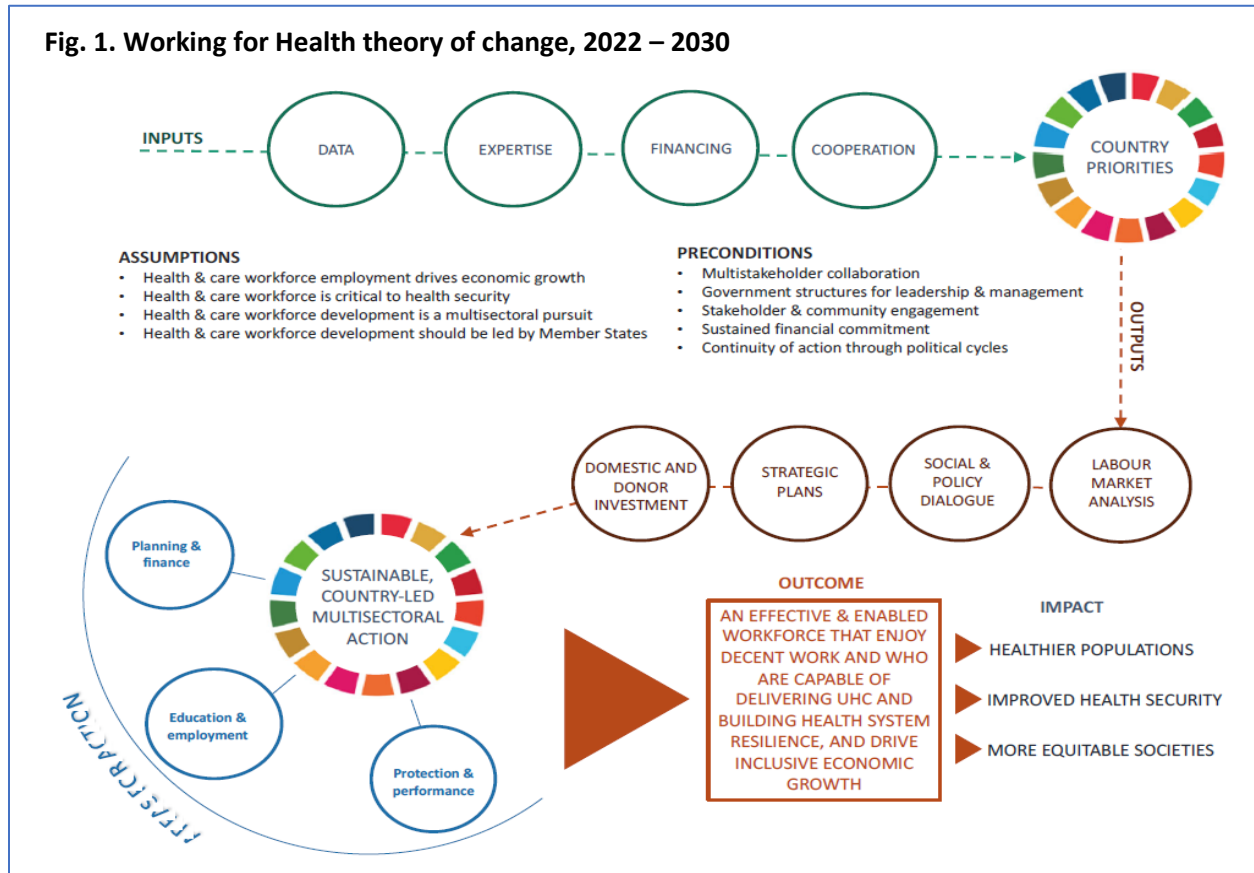
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<sup>6</sup> Amref Conference Report March 2022, CONFERENCE ON HARMONIZATION OF CURRICULUM AND TRAINING OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

<sup>7</sup> [Governance and human resources for health | Human Resources for Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

development of a fit-for-purpose workforce, which is well-educated, well-trained, well-employed, well-remunerated and retained.

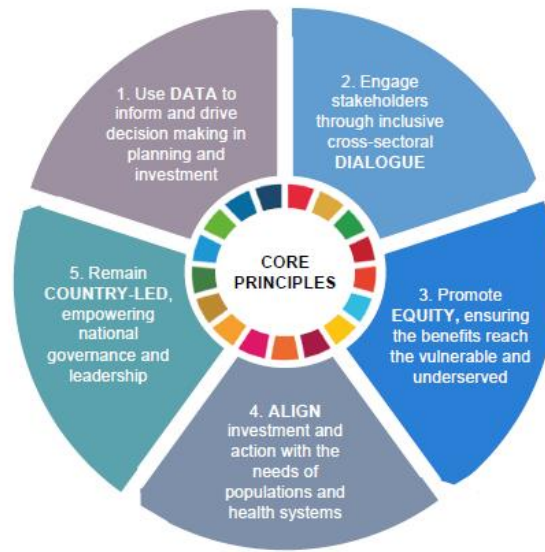
The WHO described a Working for Health Theory of Change 2022-2030. This must be supported by strong governance at the levels of structures, processes, and people.



Source: [Working for Health 2022-2030 Action Plan \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/working-for-health-2022-2030-action-plan), page 9

The plan sets forth core principles for Working for Health and functions which are needed to realize that. A Country level “Inter-sectoral and Intra-sectoral Governance Enhancement Plan” is critical for the success of any Health Workforce development strategy.

**Fig. 2. Core principles of Working for Health**



Source: [Working for Health 2022-2030 Action Plan \(who.int\)](#), page 11

Country level success to execute their Health Workforce Strategic Plan must build competencies among the governing stakeholders to master the interrelated objectives and actions shown in diagram the below exhibit.

OBJECTIVES			
	OPTIMIZE	BUILD	STRENGTHEN
	Optimize the existing health and care workforce, creating and distributing the skills and jobs needed to accelerate progress to UHC.	Build the diversity, availability, and capacity of the health and care workforce, addressing critical shortages by 2030.	Strengthen the protection and performance of the health and care workforce to deliver health for all and respond to health emergencies.
PLANNING & FINANCE	Bolster data-driven planning and secure investment in the workforce	Scale up data-driven planning and investment in the workforce	Sustain data-driven planning and investment in the workforce
EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT	Absorb and retain existing health and care workers	Build education capacity and increase employment opportunities for the workforce	Strengthen the quality of workforce education and enhance working conditions
PROTECTION & PERFORMANCE	Enforce safe and decent work, and advance gender equality and youth development	Build an equitable, equipped and supported workforce	Strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of the workforce

Source: [Working for Health 2022-2030 Action Plan \(who.int\)](#)



The USAID funded HRH 2030 focused on countries to strengthen their health leadership and governance capacities by strengthening Health Workforce planning at national and subnational levels; professionalizing human resource departments through both skills building and policy support; strengthening the regulatory environment for health professional practice; and improving multi-sectoral collaboration among stakeholders in-country and externally to move the Health Workforce agenda forward.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Demand for Better Health Workforce Governance is Well Known**

**Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure** is designed to optimize and coordinate the engagement in, ownership of, support for, and actions by diverse Health Workforce stakeholders including:

- Parliamentary Committees for:
  - Health | Higher Education | Labor
- Ministries of:
  - Health | Higher Education | Labor
- Medical and Health Professional Schools
- Health Professional Licensing Bodies/Boards
- Health Syndicates and other Bodies Representing the Profession like Health Professional and Scientific Societies
- Representatives of Employers of Health Professionals like Hospital Associations, Pharmaceutical Manufacturer Associations, Chambers of Commerce
- Representatives from public, patients, media

**“The practice of governance in relation to the field Of Health Workforce policy and planning is poorly established in many settings”**

Source: Dieleman M, Shaw DM, Zwanikken P. Improving the implementation of Health Workforce policies through governance: a review of case studies. *Human Resources Health*. 2011.

The Country-based structures and processes for Health Workforce Governance encompass clearly defined mechanisms to identify who has the authority and accountability to plan, implement these key functions:

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<sup>8</sup> [Final Report: Human Resources for Health in 2030 - Chemonics International](#)

- Developing policies and regulations to enable and empower the development of health professions and workers for better health
- Setting the Health Workforce Strategic Plan to implement the policies and regulations
- Licensing and accrediting of schools, other education and training providers, and the respective curricula for all health professionals
- Certifying and licensing of all health professionals
- Ensuring good working conditions for all health professionals

**“Structures and capabilities for Health Workforce governance are often under-developed and lacking in political support.”**

The Health Workforce function at the national-level must include well-formulated, implementable national-level Health Workforce policies, coupled with the capabilities to perform its governance function through:

*Source: Afriyie D, Nyoni J, Ahmat A. The state of strategic plans for the Health Workforce in Africa. BMJ Global Health. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2018-001115>*

1. an appropriate structure and stature for Health Workforce and its stewardship at the national and sub-national levels,
2. a well-established institutional environment with distribution of roles, responsibilities, authorities, and accountabilities across the multiplicity of Health Workforce stakeholders.
3. strong coordination among regulatory structures, Health Workforce stakeholders and professional councils,
4. inter- and intra-sectoral coalition building across the levels of government and with relevant departments such as Higher Education and Finance in addition to other stakeholders; and
5. access to and coordination of good-quality Health Workforce information for decision-making—through routine data collection as well as monitoring and evaluation systems.

This requires a strong focus on stakeholder engagement and management across levels and sectors of government, regulatory structures, and the professionals.



In addition, it should be recognized that these components all require political support and leadership and involve a large degree of relational and actor management. Together, these elements make up **the stewardship role** that is the glue that holds the other planning and implementation functions together.

### **Wise Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure must consider a multiplicity of challenges**

1. Poor distribution and retention due to undesirable work environments and frequent health worker strikes
2. Increasingly overburdened staff with shrinking staff establishments,
3. Moonlighting and unmanaged remuneration for work done outside of the public sector,
4. An inappropriate skill mix,
5. A lack of nationally integrated information system to accurately calculate Health Workforce supply needs, especially at disaggregated levels
6. Inadequate mix of established professional cadres, with nurses being by far the largest category.
7. A large numbers of community health workers providing outreach, and a small number of mid-level cadres.
8. The introduction of mid-level cadres such as the pharmacy assistant and clinical associate has faced challenges regarding funding, effective deployment, integration with other health professionals and recognition of their scope of practice by the relevant regulatory bodies
9. Diverse regulation by several professional societies/councils; and
10. Confusion between national Ministry of Health and sub-national level policy makers<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See: [Human resource governance: what does governance mean for the health workforce in low- and middle-income countries? | Human Resources for Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

Health Workforce Governance infrastructures should advance three critical dimensions for the successful implementation of Health Workforce interventions:<sup>10</sup>

- 1) advocacy,
- 2) partnerships, and
- 3) technical expertise.

**1. In advocacy**, the messengers are as important as the message; thus, designing a **clear message** and identifying **champions** who can inspire and engage other stakeholders was a critical step for gaining support for Health Workforce.

- Allocate time and resources to influence the perception of the impact of Health Workforce investments.
- Identify, generate, and use data and evidence to strengthen advocacy messages.
- Identify and support Health Workforce advocacy champions early in the implementation process and on an ongoing basis.

**2. Strong partnerships** facilitate the successful collaboration and coordination across multiple ministries, cadres, and sectors that are often needed for Health Workforce activities

- Conduct an initial environmental analysis to identify potential stakeholders and their priority implementation agendas.
- Ensure comprehensive representation of and address potential conflict between different stakeholder groups.
- Develop systematic and efficient coordination mechanisms.
- Build strong relationships across government stakeholders.

**3. Technical expertise** is needed to advance complex reforms. In fields such as Health Workforce, technical expertise is scarce, and identifying individuals with experience in Health Workforce governance and management can be challenging. Further, the multidisciplinary nature of Health Workforce increases this challenge.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See also: [HRH » Critical Success Factors \(capacityproject.org\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> Creating an Enabling Environment for HRH Program Implementation in Three African Countries, USAID IntraHealth 2013

- Recruit staff with skills and knowledge in Health Workforce and related areas such as advocacy, IT, M&E, and gender.
- Incorporate capacity-building activities for stakeholders into implementation plans for Health Workforce interventions, to improve sustainability.
- Develop a strategy to improve staff retention, such as providing a competitive incentive package to employees.

### **Amref-HGI Health Workforce Governance Initiative**

Amref and HGI have identified the Governance of Health Workforce as a key priority and are initiating a constructive process to build capacity in Africa. This is based on three interconnected pillars:

- *Generating conceptual clarity and strategic direction:*

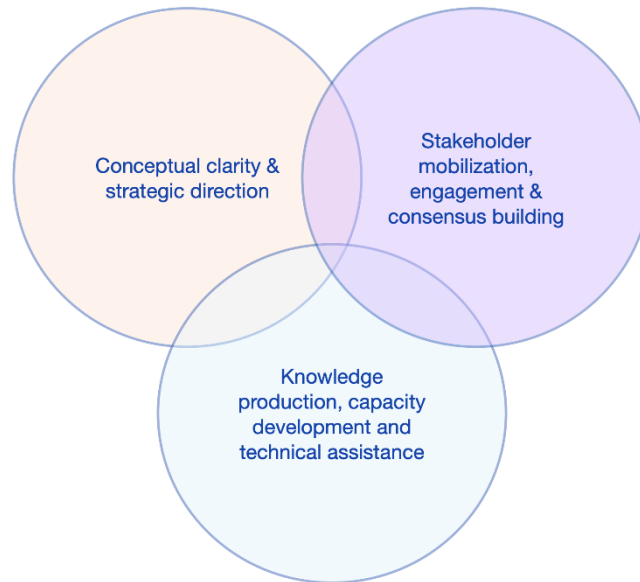
This intends to help understand the context of Health Workforce in Africa with the current governance deficits and governance related challenges. It supports stakeholders to navigate through the complexity, explore options, and get clarity on what are the best strategic directions and approaches to enhance Health Workforce Governance in Africa.

- *Stakeholder mobilization, engagement, and consensus building:*

This intends to generate interest among different stakeholders to tackle Health Workforce Governance, bring them together and build a common vision among them towards governing Health Workforce in the continent.

- *Knowledge production, sharing, capacity development and technical assistance:*

This intends to generate the necessary research evidence, conceptual frameworks, guidance notes and implementation tools. This is to be combined with capacity development and technical assistance to empower stakeholders to enhance governance Health Workforce.



**Amref and HGI are to develop a comprehensive package to support African countries to better govern Health Workforce with the following objectives:**

***Objective 1:***

Support the public sector in making better decisions and choices on how to plan Health Workforce and utilize Health Workforce to advance health system performance.

***Objective 2:***

Support the public sector in leveraging its influence on the structure and behavior of the Health Workforce labor market.

***Objective 3:***

Align interests among different stakeholders and foster dialogue and cooperation between them to advance Health Workforce.

***Objective 4:***

Create frameworks for building an institutional infrastructure to advance Health Workforce Performance.

***Objective 5:***

Build institutional capacities of public and private sector actors to govern Health Workforce.

**Objective 6:**

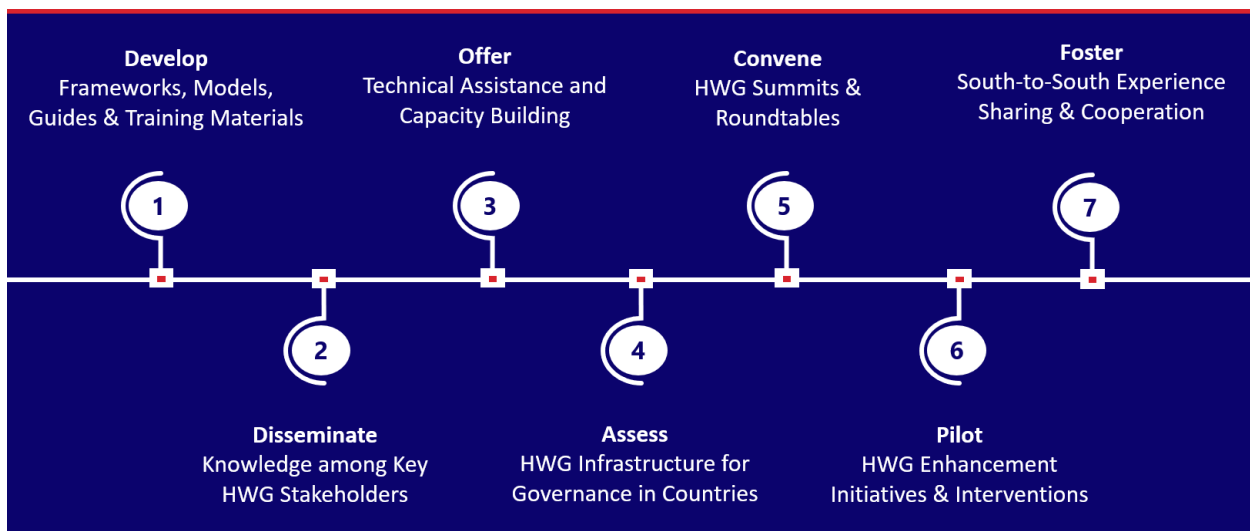
Mobilize resources and investments to advance Health Workforce.

**Seven Imperatives for Health Workforce Governance Enhancement in Africa**

Building on the extensive work by WHO Technical Working Groups (TWG),<sup>12</sup> and in advancement of different calls for action for Health Workforce, Amref and HGI, are focusing on seven (7) clusters of action and investments which are essential to ensure the availability of strong country level Health Workforce Governance and Leadership. Collaboration and shared learning across national boundaries, but focused actions within each nation is required to ensure that Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure will be unpacked, unleashed, and empowered.

The **seven imperatives** shaping the **Africa Health Workforce Governance Initiative** are:

1. **Develop** Frameworks, Models, Guides and Training Materials
2. **Disseminate** Knowledge among Stakeholders
3. **Build** Capacities and Offer Technical Support
4. **Assess** Health Workforce Infrastructure for Governance in Countries
5. **Pilot** Health Workforce Governance Enhancement Initiatives and Interventions
6. **Convene** Health Workforce Governance Summit
7. **Foster** South- South Experience Sharing and Cooperation



<sup>12</sup> See: WHO Technical Working Group No. 5, 2015 op.cit.

The call-to-action within each of these seven spheres are outlined below as a mean to invite insights and refinements from diverse stakeholders, which is key to sustained Health Workforce success.

## **1. Develop Frameworks, Models, Guides and Training Materials**

- Review literature and best practice
- Conduct cross national review of Health Workforce Governance infrastructure to generate global experience, for example from UK, EU, India, Australia and USA, especially looking at: distribution of roles, responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities around different Health Workforce functions; Institutional capacities and governing structures and processes; Leaders and governing boards
- Collect case-studies on Health Workforce governance reforms
- Develop a Health Workforce Governance Guide
  - Establish Health Workforce Governance Guide Technical Working Group
  - Draft Guide for Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure
  - Seek review and endorsement of Guide by multi-stakeholders
  - Publish and disseminate Guide to all Health Workforce Stakeholders
  - Evaluate understanding and use of the Guide among multi-stakeholders
  - Produce Annual Update of the Guide
- Design, develop and test Health Workforce Governance models

## **2. Share Knowledge with Stakeholders**

- Mobilize social media campaigns to disseminate practical design and operational best practices
- Adapt Health Workforce Governance Assessment Tools for web-based application
- Disseminate guides, briefs and best-practices.
- Hold webinars and roundtables

### **3. Support Countries and Build Capacities**

- Conduct trainings at the country, regional and continent level.
- Conduct Training of Trainers and Training of Experts to generate national capacities for expansion and sustainability
- Offer technical assistance for in-country application
- Enable Technical Assistance Teams of local and international advisors to enhance Health Workforce Governance practices
- Identify priority areas expected to need consulting support for Health Workforce governance enhancement (Such as: governing organizations, governing boards, accountabilities, and governance-related risk)
- Schedule and conduct technical assistance
- Evaluate technical assistance projects
- Produce annual report on results and future needs

### **4. Assess Health Workforce Infrastructure for Governance: Compare Africa Models to Global Experience**

- Establish MOU with selected Ministries of Health for collaboration and coordination
- Form National Governance Health Workforce Assessment Technical Working Group
- Establish comprehensive data base of Health Workforce multi-stakeholders in country
- Conduct National Symposium on Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure best practices
- Define country focused assessment process and schedule
- Conduct multi-stakeholder web-based review of Health Workforce Governance
- Review draft with MoH and Health Workforce Assessment TWG
- Compare with global experience and best practice
- Develop a Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure Enhancement (GIE) Action Plan
- Secure MOU to implement Health Workforce GIE Action Plan
- Mobilize resources for application



## 5. **Pilot Health Workforce Governance Models**

- Establish MOU in each country for Pilot with Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and key professional bodies
- Form Pilot Coordinating and Oversight Committee
- Develop Implementation Roadmap and Action Plan
- Convene Pilot Launch Event
- Support Pilot experiences
- Conduct evaluation of pilot insights
- Update design of Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure Model
- Publish 3-year GIE Action Plan and Health Workforce Financing Facility

## 6. **Convene Health Workforce Governance Summit**

- Facilitate joint learning about Health Workforce Governance Infrastructure operational lessons
  - Form Steering Committee for Health Workforce Governance Summit
  - Establish Summit Program and Speakers
  - Encourage Multi-Stakeholder participation from four countries
  - Promote multi-media reporting on Summit
  - Encourage reaffirmation of Country Health Workforce Strategic Planning and Health Workforce Governance Enhancements
  - Enable country-based Health Workforce Funding Facility

## 7. **Foster South- South Assistance**

- Establish South – South Consulting TWG to oversee scope of assistance, access, and quality
- Establish funding pool to support technical assistance in each country
- Invite and schedule MOUs for cross-assistance in other countries
- Create regional platforms for experience sharing
- Facilitate the creation of regional expert groups