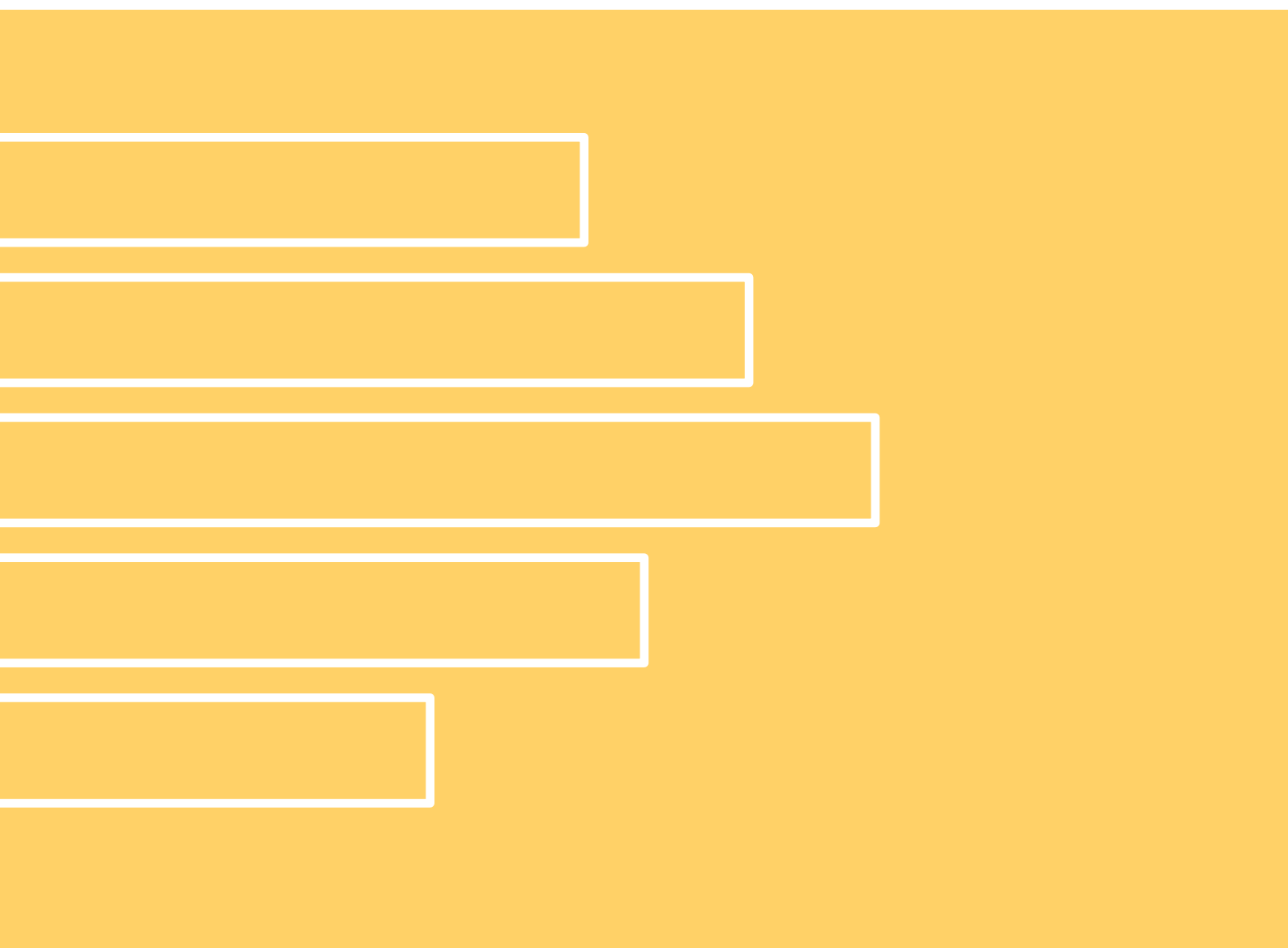




# **iAHO & AHOP: complementarity and interactions for the use of data and knowledge for decision-making in WHO AFRO**

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Technical note



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## Background

The Ministerial Conference on Research for Health in the African Region, held in Algiers from 23 to 26 June 2008, adopted the Algiers Declaration renewing the commitment of Member States to strengthen national health research, information systems and knowledge management systems to improve health in the African Region. The Algiers Declaration offers a framework to narrow the knowledge gap and thereby improve knowledge generation and the use of knowledge to inform policies, strategies, and actions.

The World Health Organization (WHO) started work on health observatories in the African region in 2010 when it established the African Health Observatory (AHO).<sup>1</sup> This followed the 2009 recommendation of the Regional Committee for Africa (AFR/RC59/5).<sup>2</sup> In November 2012, during the sixty-second session of the Regional Committee for Africa (RC62) held in Luanda, health ministers of the African Region agreed to establish national health observatories in their respective countries and adopted the resolution entitled “The African Health Observatory: an opportunity to strengthen health information systems through national health observatories.” With the support of the AHO, several countries are developing their national health observatories (NHOs) to strengthen their national health information systems and promote the use of data for better action.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO 2018. The African Health Observatory. Available online as : <https://www.aho.afro.who.int/> accessed on 1 November 2019

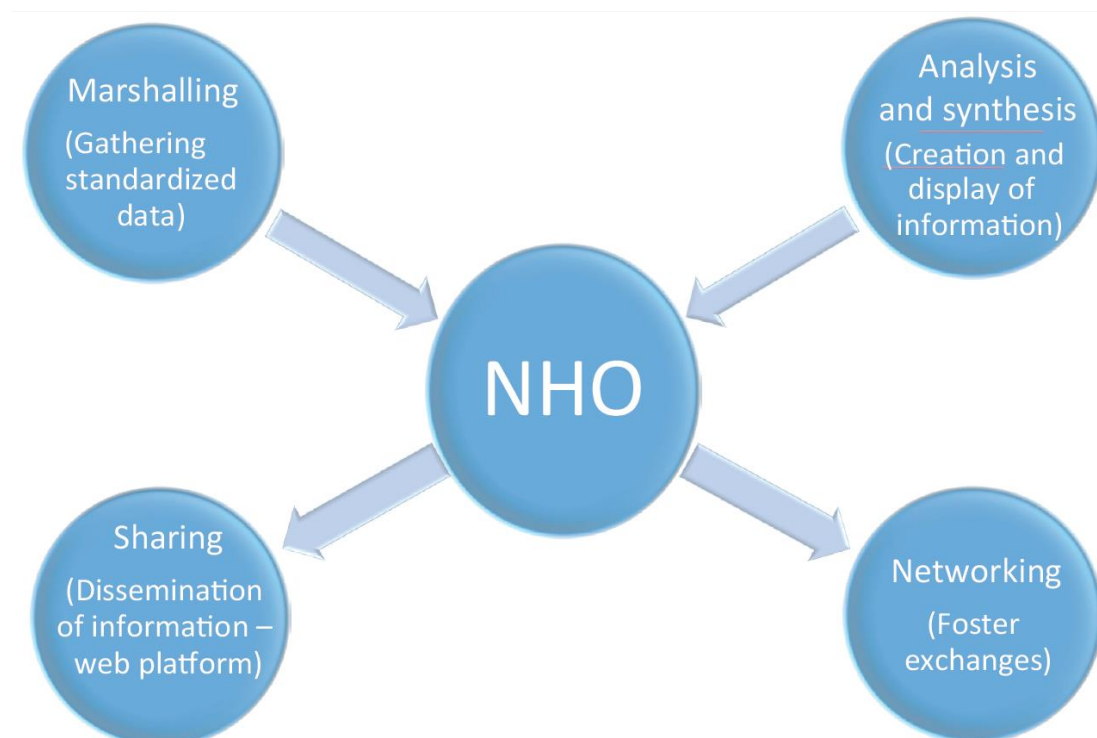
<sup>2</sup> WHO 2009. The Regional Committee for Africa (AFR/RC59/5). Framework for the implementation of the Algiers Declaration on research for health in the African region. Report of the Secretariat available online as : [http://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/sessions/working\\_documents/AFR-RC59-5fin.pdf](http://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/sessions/working_documents/AFR-RC59-5fin.pdf) accessed on 1 November 2019

# The Role of the AHO and NHOs in Strategic Health Information

AHO is the regional observatory based and managed by WHO/AFRO. It brings together all the key information (Data - Analytics - Knowledge) on the WHO African region and on the 47 member states. It is a one-stop shop for standardized and validated information at both national and international levels with clear information on data sources. The NHOs are national declinations of the AHO and strengthen the national health information system. They thus contribute to reducing fragmentation and making key information available in a one-stop shop at national and sub-national levels. The institutional anchorage varies from country to country, but in the region, there are three groups: (i) integrated as a structure in the Information System/Planning Directorate of the Ministry of Health, (ii) integrated as a unit attached to the General Secretariat or the Minister's Office, or (iii) integrated as a fully-fledged structure attached to the Prime Ministry.

The role of AHO and NHOs in monitoring progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is critical in marshalling (gathering of standardized secondary data); analyzing and synthesizing (creation and display of information); networking (fostering of exchanges); and, sharing (dissemination of information through the web platform) health intelligence for better decisions and actions.

*Figure 1: Key Functions of an NHO in the WHO African Region*



The AHO and NHOs have a major role to play in national and international agendas. Knowledge produced at the national and subnational levels, interactions with non-health stakeholders through synthesizing and sharing knowledge, as well as transparency and consensus will reduce fragmentation and duplication of efforts and contribute towards reduced inequality and inequity. The aim is to ensure availability of required information during the decision-making processes. Specifically, targeted is the improvement of the systems for data generation, validation, analysis, dissemination, and knowledge management for facility-based routine HIS, community-based vital statistics, health surveys and census data.

## Integrated African Health Observatory (iAHO)

In 2019, to address the obsolete technology of the AHO and make it responsive to the Region's health information needs, the Observatory was redeveloped into an integrated platform called the "integrated African Health Observatory" (iAHO). The iAHO hosts the AHO and NHOs of all the Member States. It is centrally hosted and coordinated by WHO, but Member States own and manage their NHOs platform within it. This transformation ensures sustainability, both financial with central hosting at the Regional Office for Africa and in terms of the technical support required to operationalize the NHOs.

In brief, iAHO is a strategic health intelligence platform that hosts the Regional African Health Observatory (AHO) in addition to the National Health Observatories (NHOs) of the 47 Member States of the WHO African Region. It provides an extensive real-time view of what is happening in the health sector and how the health of populations in the Region is progressing. The vision of a fully actualized iAHO is that of a structure that improves availability and use of information and evidence for policy dialogue and health decision-making, while also monitoring and evaluating the implementation of programs, national strategies and plans, and health systems development/strengthening efforts. These, as well as the optimized generation and facilitation of use of knowledge, and the exchange of ideas. Moreover, an integrated platform facilitates cross-country learning and comparison, drawing traffic to the NHOs, in addition to ensuring harmony across the multiple embedded internal platforms. With this new structure, the scope of observatories was also broadened, enabling a focus on multiple dimensions of health information ranging from data and statistics to analytics, to knowledge and evidence.

# The Role of the African Health Observatory Platform on Health Systems & Policies (AHOP)

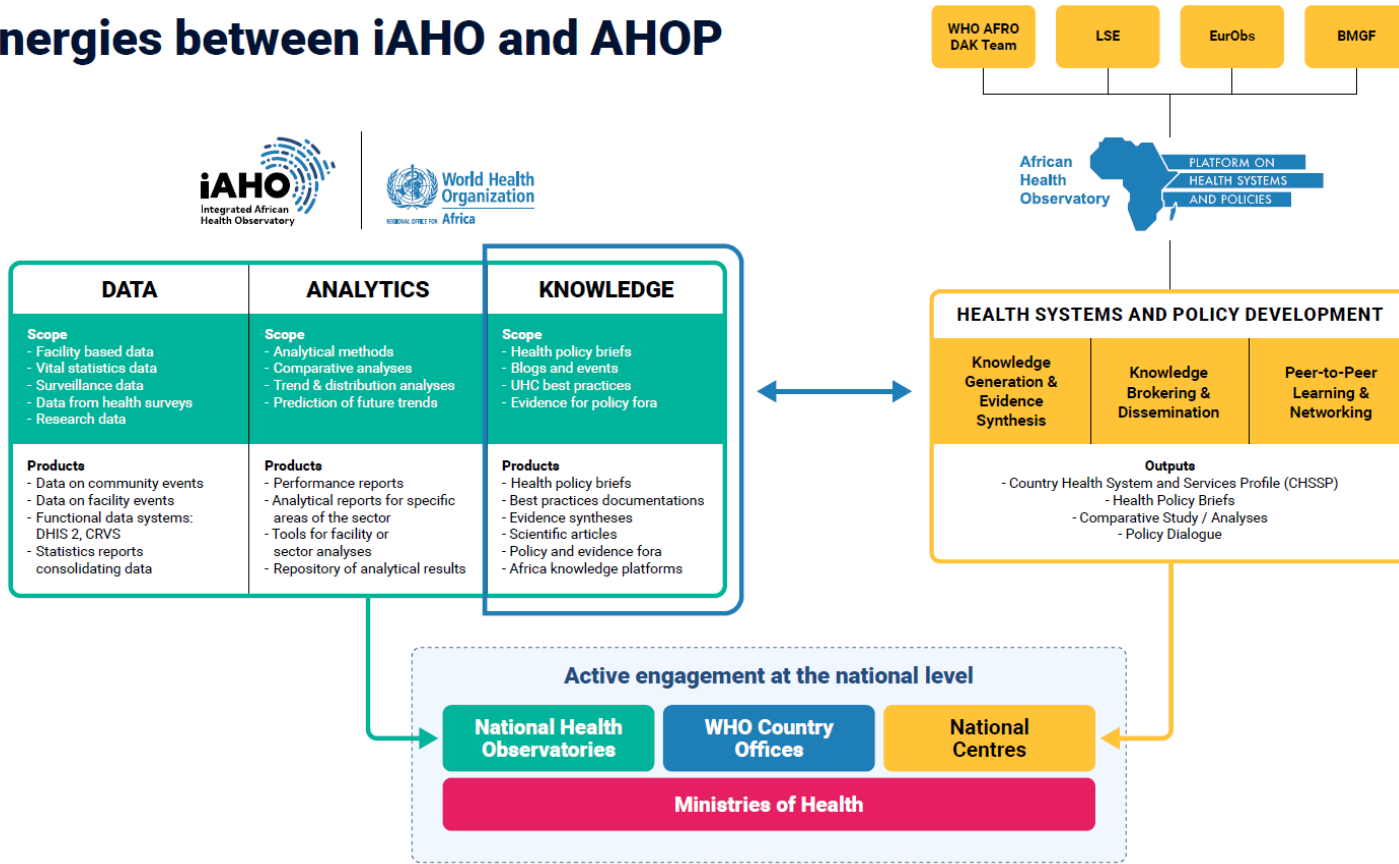
AHOP (<https://ahop.aho.afro.who.int/>) was launched in 2020 as one of several platforms to be hosted within the iAHO<sup>3</sup>. The WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFRO) are Secretariat, as well as a member of the technical consortium, in collaboration with key partners: The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). –AHOP is a collaborative partnership that supports and promotes the comparative synthesis and transfer of evidence and experience between countries to foster better policies and action for improved health and well-being. Policy-relevant products are produced by AHOP's National Centres (NCs) using a standard framework, which currently include institutions in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Senegal. There is interest to expand the number of NCs in the future.

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to the African Health Workforce Observatory, and Medical Products Observatory (in development)

Figure 2: Synergies between AFRO's work and AHOP

## Synergies between iAHO and AHOP



# NHO & AHOP NC interface

AHOP is hosted by and - aligned to the iAHO and contributes to the knowledge component (see figure 2) of the three pillars of strategic information to which AFRO adheres. It is therefore neither a substitute for the iAHO/NHO; rather, it contributes to the synthesis, translation and use of knowledge for policy dialogue on health systems in Africa and is tasked with providing specific outputs. Because of its standardized approach, the products generated for use at a country level can also serve as reference cases for cross-country comparisons within the Region.

AHOP's mode of governance involves several partners: WHO/AFRO, LSE, EURO OBS, BMGF and 5 NCs based in 5 African countries. The partnership leverages the comparative advantages of each partner and remains aligned with the strategic priorities of the Region. The AHOP Programme of Work (PoW) has very specific deliverables that will be developed by each National Centre:

- **Country Health System and Services Profiles (CHSSP)** – detailed reviews of a country's health system, performance and policy initiatives.
- **Policy briefs** – Short, tailored evidence reviews that address health policy-makers' questions, with an emphasis on clarity, accessibility and matching evidence to policy needs. Depending on policy needs and national priorities, AHOP PBs can be issue-focused or country-focused, part of a rapid response or a longer piece of work.
- **Comparative and thematic studies** – In-depth analyses of a specific health system function or issue based on secondary research.
- **Policy dialogues** – A particular brand of fora bringing evidence to policy: highly focused events targeting senior policymakers and advisers, and marshalling support for key decision points. Policy dialogues serve as a mechanism for drawing in expertise and policy-makers to support evidence informed discussion and foster mutual learning.

In the country contexts, AHOP's designated NC works in close collaboration with the NHO, following the regional model where AHOP outputs are hosted by the iAHO (<https://aho.afro.who.int/knowledge/af>). In the case of the NCs, the day-to-day support to the National Centre for AHOP-related work is provided by LSE who manage the AHOP NC grants, which ensures consistency across the deliverables to be produced by the research institution. The AHOP NC in the country does not replace the NHO, but rather strengthens its "knowledge synthesis" component through production of AHOP-specific deliverables. In this context, a synergy of action is necessary and strongly recommended, for example in the approach of the Ministry of Health to get their opinion on policy brief topics or in the policy dialogue process. The points of synergy are identified and refined locally considering the comparative advantages of each entity, bearing in mind that NHO has an institutional anchorage which allows it to have a wider network of actors which can be beneficial to the work of AHOP NC. Both NHOs and NCs can also develop partnerships with other national entities (academic institutions, research bodies, etc.) as part of their normal scope of work.



# Key Messages

- (1) AHOP is a partnership that enables the capacities of universities and research institutions (National Centres) to be used to produce knowledge that is useful for decision-makers. It is therefore a bridge between academia and decision makers especially in the context of the policy dialogue.
- (2) AFRO supports the development of national health observatories in countries in order to promote the effective use of data and knowledge for policy-making, thus, at the request of countries the Integrated African Health Observatory (iAHO) has been developed to support the 47 Member States in the region.
- (3) AHOP complements iAHO at regional level and NHO at national level. It is a distinct programme of work that is aligned to the wider ambitions of the iAHO/NHO. Specifically, AHOP NCs are committed to synthesizing existing health system evidence and relaying this evidence as set out in the AHOP PoW. It is a partnership with a specific programme model that reinforces knowledge brokering for policy action both within countries and across the Region. AHOP is one of the platforms embedded in the Knowledge and Evidence section of iAHO.
- (4) The National Centres in AHOP countries work in liaison with NHOs. Each entity has complementary, but distinct roles and there is mutual benefit for AHOP NCs and NHOs in understanding where their activities are aligned-, particularly in the production of knowledge according to the deliverables expected by AHOP. The NHO will therefore help facilitate access to national data and research, and the dissemination of AHOP products in the countries.
- (5) AHOP is a partnership that enables the capacities of universities and research institutions (National Centres) to be used to produce knowledge that is useful for decision-makers. It is therefore a bridge between academia and decision makers especially in the context of the policy dialogue and policy brief.