

## **ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN CREATING ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR IMPROVED DIGITAL HEALTH ECOSYSTEM: CASE STUDY OF TANZANIA HEALTH INFORMATICS ASSOCIATION (TAHIA)**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies are becoming increasingly popular globally as their positive impact on a wide range of domains continues to expand. The past decade has led to an explosion of new data sources and less expensive computing resources democratizing the proliferation of different Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies including Artificial intelligence.

In 2019, Tanzania undertook a pioneering journey to reshape its healthcare system through a comprehensive digital health strategy (2019-2024). This strategy aspired to harness digital technologies and data-driven insights, aiming for improved health outcomes via a digitally adept health system. As the culmination of this strategy approaches, the Ministry of Health, backed by a spectrum of stakeholders, initiated the three-day Digital Health Convergence Workshop (CW) from 31st July to 2nd August 2023 at the Protea Hotel Dar es Salaam Courtyard.

**Context and Significance:** Professional associations play a significant role in organizing Convergence Workshops (CW) aimed at critically assessing the strategy's five strategic goals and ten strategic objectives, mainly focusing on the progress and potential of emerging digital technologies and addressing health system challenges to boost health service delivery in Tanzania. Such an evaluative gathering offers a unique platform for stakeholders to review and reflect on successes and challenges, and collaboratively create an action and investment plan, identifying and addressing gaps in the ongoing health initiatives.

### **Strategic Goals of Tanzania's Health Strategy:**

- i. Strengthened digital health governance and leadership.
- ii. Improved client experience via high-quality health services.
- iii. Empowered healthcare personnel for evidence-based actions.

- iv. Sustained health resource availability.
- v. Standardized health information exchange.

As the culmination of this strategy approaches, the Ministry of Health, backed by a spectrum of stakeholders, initiated the three-day Digital Health Convergence Workshop (CW) from 31st July to 2nd August 2023 in Dar es Salaam. The Goals and objectives of the workshop were;

- i. Enhance understanding and implementation of the National Digital Health
- ii. Develop strategies for strengthening the capacity of health informaticians in
- iii. Promote collaboration in the digital health transformation in

### **Organizers and Participants:**

Spearheaded by the Tanzania Health Informatics Association (TAHIA), the Ministry of Health, and the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PORALG), other collaborators included the Pan African Health Informatics Association (HELINA), USAID, CDC, GIZ, UNICEF, Different Implementing Partners, Academia, Innovators and Private sector.

### **Problem Statement**

Insufficient coordination of digital health investment has resulted in duplication of efforts and wastage of resources. Since Digital Health experts experience individual organizational planning without involving other organizations, this trend results in duplication of efforts and resources.

Uncoordinated and oftentimes parallel planning of digital health investment presents a lack of shared vision across organizations which is necessary to create a shared and equitable value of resources in limited resource settings. The absence of Professional association contribution to the digital health ecosystem has been acknowledged as exacerbating the described problem.

## **Significance**

This abstract intends to converge different players of digital health including Government, Development partners, Implementing partners, private sector, and academia with the focus on creating a shared vision and implementation plan. This implementation plan developed during a convergence workshop will create a value of resources for digital health investment. The Convergence Workshop aimed to critically assess the strategy's five strategic goals and ten strategic objectives, mainly focusing on the progress and potential of emerging digital technologies and addressing health system challenges/barriers to boost health service delivery in Tanzania.

## **Specific Objectives**

- i. To identify the gap/challenges in creating a shared vision in the Digital Health ecosystem.
- ii. To evaluate the harmonization of activities in developing a shared implementation plan by Digital Health stakeholders in the Digital health ecosystem.
- iii. To review progress on the implementation of the Tanzania digital health strategy 2019-2024 and the digital health investment roadmap and PHC digital transformation
- iv. To review and update the inventory of current and planned digital health interventions using the Tanzania Digital Health
- v. To develop an action plan on how the Tanzania Health Informatics Association (TAHIA), in collaboration with partners, can contribute to enhancing the capacity and role of health informatics in strengthening the health.

## **Achievements:**

The following were achievements attained in the Convergence Workshop and TAHIA Launching.

- i. Successful Launching of the Tanzania Health Informatics Association (TAHIA) which was graced by the Honorable Deputy Minister, Dr Godwin Mollel (MP).
- ii. The Shared implementation plan which has been signed by MOH and PORALG, which clearly articulates the priorities and timelines
- iii. Agreed priority areas and an approach for addressing identified Digital Health Strategy implementation gaps
- iv. The investment plan with preliminary commitments from partners and stakeholders to support the interventions.

## **Workshop Highlights:**

The themes explored spanned Tanzania's Digital Health Strategy for 2019-2024, the Health Enterprise Architecture Blueprint, and Primary Health Care Digital Transformation. The discussions expanded to cover digital health initiatives mapped to the WHO's health systems building blocks, the role of Artificial Intelligence, and health system interoperability.

## **Conclusion:**

TAHIA in collaboration with the Government and partners provided its role by coordinating different digital health stakeholders in developing a shared implementation plan, which was signed by MOH and PORALG, and contributed to the deduplication of efforts and resources as it provides the value of resources. This workshop holds profound significance for the Ministry of Health and its stakeholders, signifying a renewed commitment to digital innovation in healthcare. The concerted efforts of all participants point towards Tanzania's unwavering pursuit of universal

healthcare and an advanced digital health ecosystem. More emphasis and alarming concern was to foster digital systems interoperability and develop a Unified Health information system. Professional associations through CW culminated in TAHIA's official launch, overseen by the deputy Health minister, and marked the debut of TAHIA's digital platforms.