

The IGAD secretariat hosted its member states for an expert technical working group and steering committee in Mombasa Kenya from June 23rd to 26th June 2021 to showcase the progress and achievements made during the five-year RAD project that is funded by the USAID and implemented by IGAD, Duke Global Health Innovation Center, Broadreach, Jembi, and WAHO.

In attendance were Dr. Patricia Odero and Juliana Hagembe, both of who work with the Duke Global Health Innovation Center.

A key highlight of the meeting was the review of the final draft of the Regional Data Sharing and protection policy framework that IGAD developed with Technical Support from Duke Global Health Innovation Center.

This policy framework aims to mitigate challenges that emerge from a lack of consistent and aligned data privacy and sharing policies among the IGAD Member States, including the inability to effectively monitor routine health indicators for cross-border mobile populations (CBMPs); inaccurate and untimely predictions of disease outbreaks across the region; challenges in planning, resource allocation, and evidence-based decision making; and inconsistent cross-border flow of health information, which do not meet the current privacy standards.

This regional policy is a first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa, that with consistent uptake and implementation amongst member states, will establish a clear framework for health data protection and sharing, thereby assisting the IGAD Member States in considering the appropriate safeguards to apply while sharing health data, to maximize the benefits of data-sharing, and safeguard the privacy and interests of individuals and the Member States. In particular, the policy aims to

- Facilitate an environment that enhances the sharing of health data between the Member States (at various levels) to promote continuity of care, improve epidemic control, and enhance public health planning;
- Complement laws and regulations on privacy and personal data protection and ensure patient confidentiality when data is shared across the Member States;
- Support harmonization of data sharing policies and practices across the region by encouraging the Member States to include a section on cross border health data sharing in their national health policies;
- Serve as a dynamic instrument that can respond to future developments in the science, technology, and practices of cross-border health-related data sharing.

The development of this policy was informed by a series of in-person and written consultations from experts and stakeholders in member states and draws on best practices from the existing data protection laws in member states, RECs as well as global bodies.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, cross-border sharing of health data is critical to ensure that countries can implement evidence-based interventions to improve population health.

At the end of the meeting, the experts and steering committee endorsed the IGAD regional data sharing and protection policy framework and the policy implementation guide and recommended their ratification by member states.