



COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

Commonwealth West Africa Regional Meeting on eHealth – use of information and communication technology for health 10-11 December 2009 Abuja, Nigeria

1 Introduction

Every country needs good eHealth policies, strategies and plans to invest in information and communication technologies (ICT) and the organisational changes needed to improve health and healthcare. This combination of ICT and organisational change comprises eHealth.

eHealth can provide information at the right time to support healthcare strategies, healthcare professionals; the ICT needed to deliver healthcare services and can catalyse organisational change, and transform clinical and working practices needed to realise health benefits.

2 Background

In May 2008, the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) mandated the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist countries to:

- Convene High-Level Consultations involving Ministers of Health and Ministers with responsibility for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on the policy challenges facing the rapid scale-up of eHealth approaches;
- Promote the exchange of eHealth expertise between Commonwealth countries;
- Seek funding to support pilot interventions that would serve as regional examples of the potential for eHealth to influence overall socio-economic development across communities.

The first High-Level Dialogue was convened for East, Central and Southern African countries in September 2008 in the Seychelles. As an outcome of this meeting, some countries have initiated activities to develop their eHealth strategy.

The ECSA Ministerial Dialogue identified three main needs:

- The lack of eHealth policies and strategies limits progress on eHealth, especially in eHealth capacity;
- The lack of knowledge of current eHealth initiatives at country and regional levels, especially in mixed health economies, needs to be overcome;
- Inadequate skills in preparing eHealth proposals to gain access to finance need developing.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is mandated to work with member countries to develop strategies to address these needs.

Two products have been developed by the Secretariat in this process:

- An assessment tool to assess the eHealth status in Commonwealth countries
- A methodology and templates for eHealth policy and strategy development.

3 The West African eHealth Dialogue

The West African eHealth Dialogue will bring together Ministers and Senior Officials from the Ministries of Health and the Ministries responsible for Information Communication and Technology (ICT) in Commonwealth West African countries. The Dialogue will facilitate information sharing among countries and enable them to identify priority needs, policies, plans and partnership arrangements in regard to the eHealth agenda.

4 Objectives of Dialogue

- To share country experiences in eHealth policies, strategies, programmes and plans, ICT infrastructure and services
- To share best practices and new initiatives on e-Health
- To introduce participants to the Commonwealth Secretariat eHealth assessment tools and the template for developing country eHealth policies and strategies
- To define the steps and the support required by countries to conduct country assessments, develop eHealth policies and plans and implement effective eHealth projects.

5 Expected Outcomes of Dialogue

- Information about existing eHealth capacity and projects in countries shared;
- Stakeholder engagement and discussions on eHealth policy and strategy development and project implementation achieved;
- Key leaders and working groups identified to take forward the eHealth policy and strategy and implementation process at country level;
- Concrete projects identified by countries.

Annex 1

Commonwealth Secretariat eHealth assessments tool

Why the assessments are necessary?

The information collected from the eHealth assessment will enable eHealth plans and projects to reflect current performance, current capacity, inter-operability, functionalities, optimal utilisation, avoid duplication and support scale-up requirements. The Commonwealth Secretariat and ECSA-HC eHealth Technical Working Group have developed a questionnaire which member countries could modify to suit their information needs.

Methodology for the assessment

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies will be used. The ComSec/ECSA eHealth Technical Working Group's *ehealth Situation Analysis tool* will be used to collect information about existing eHealth capacity and projects in a country.

The questionnaire requires technical and organisational information. Directors of ICT, or their equivalents, would complete it with the help of their healthcare colleagues, especially Regional/Provincial and District Directors of Health who are close to districts and communities.

A template has been developed to collect information on existing eHealth projects in the country. Regional/Provincial and District Directors of Health, universities and research institutes, civil society organisation and identified private sector practitioners would be asked to submit descriptions of eHealth projects under their jurisdiction. The template is also available on the Commonwealth Secretariat's [health](http://www.thecommonwealth.org/health) webpage

<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/form/190698/190856/211243/survey/>

The template seeks information on the following parameters:

- Implementer(s)
- Partner(s)
- Funder(s)
- Description of project
 - Objective(s)
 - Activities
 - Infrastructural and equipment required
 - Human resources required
- Costs
- Benefits
- Sustainability plan
- Challenges

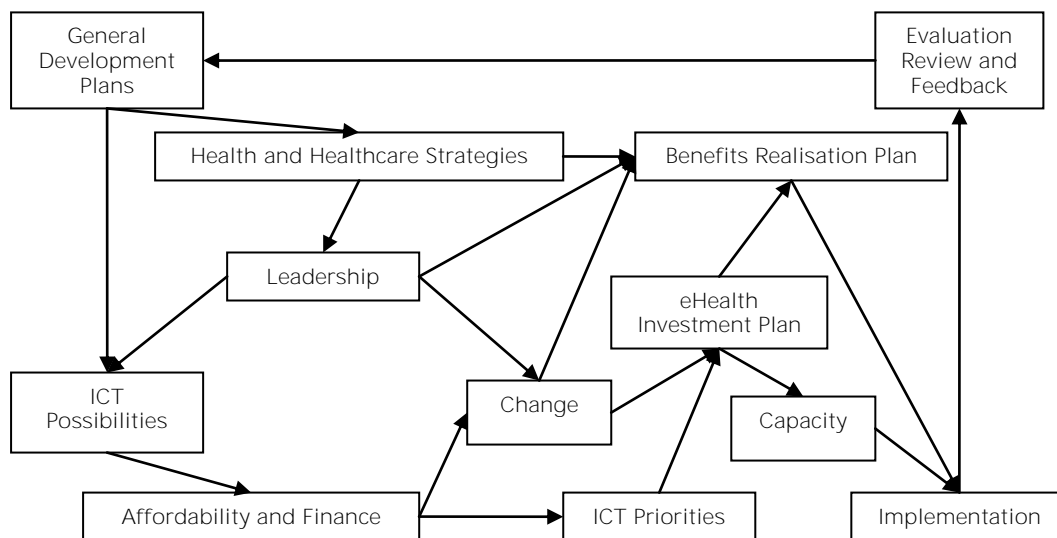
the eHealth policy and strategy development process for the region/country using the Commonwealth Secretariat template for eHealth policy and strategy.

Annex 2

Commonwealth Secretariat template for eHealth policy and strategy

The Commonwealth Secretariat methodology and template for eHealth policy and strategy is a simple, user friendly, comprehensive and generic framework that can be used in a step-by-step approach to policy and strategy development with minimal external assistance. It could be used to identify any additional information that may not be readily available and needs collecting for eHealth policies and strategies and the organisational changes needed to realise the benefits from eHealth.

The main themes of the methodology and template for eHealth policy and strategy are represented in the continuous strategic loop below.



The structure of the methodology and templates disaggregates the eHealth themes and complexities so people can deal with them separately and directly. Components can then link together so that assessments and decisions can connect and follow through in a continuous strategy loop. Each template is in a simple Word table so people can change the templates easily to add, delete or modify themes and components to meet their specific needs.

National Health Authority, Regional/Provincial and District Directors of Health, universities and research institutes, civil society organisations and identified private sector practitioners, general ICT people from other Ministries, telecoms companies and ICT vendors would complete the generic templates for eHealth policies and strategies and initiate further discussions and actions to write up the eHealth policy and strategy for the region/country.