



Dr Boureima Hama Sambo

Candidate for the position of WHO
Regional Director for Africa

Shaping a better tomorrow: a vision for a healthy, prosperous, and safe African Region



As a candidate for the position of World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa, a region home to nearly 1.16 billion people, spread across 47 Member States, I am here to share my vision with you and outline my priorities for the next five years. My focus will be on providing support to countries in achieving the common goals of WHO's Fourteenth General Programme of Work, accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and pursuing the goals of Agenda 2063.

My vision is for a healthy, prosperous, and safe African Region, where everyone, everywhere in the Region enjoys healthy and productive lives.



Need for a renewed vision for the African Region - the “Why”

The African Region stands at a critical juncture. Over the past decade, there have been significant improvements that have led to more people in the Region living longer and healthier lives. Despite these advances, the Region's health and health systems are facing a variety of challenges, including the ongoing threat from communicable and tropical diseases, growing pressures on health budgets caused by the increase in chronic medical conditions, persistent inequities in health outcomes and weak infrastructure and resource constraints. These have been exacerbated by recent polycrises such as climate-related issues, the COVID-19 pandemic and mounting conflicts.

Despite being home to the world's youngest and fastest-growing population, the Region presents myriad opportunities for robust, inclusive growth that harnesses its rich natural resources and abundant human potential to boost prosperity, not only in Africa but around the world. As countries strive to reap the benefits of green and sustainable economic growth, African ministries of health have an opportunity to contribute to realizing their countries' full potential by improving the health and well-being of their populations.

Priorities to accelerate the momentum – the “What”



In pursuit of this vision, I believe WHO can play an important role in supporting countries to dismantle the barriers that have hindered progress, by prioritizing investment in health, strengthening systems and institutions, fostering partnerships and empowering communities to lead the charge in shaping their own health destinies.

To enable tangible and sustainable progress towards the Africa Health Strategy 2016–2030 and the SDGs, my primary focus will be on providing heightened support in **five key areas**, with gender and equality at their core.

1 Address the main drivers of the disease burden

The African Region has historically been disproportionately affected by infectious diseases and neglected tropical diseases. Over the past two decades, the Region has seen a surge in the burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), injuries, and mental health disorders, due to the rising incidence of NCD risk factors. Despite the strides made, many countries in the Region have the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world. In addition, increasing antimicrobial resistance and re-emerging infectious diseases have put the security and lives of people at risk.

Every year, these illnesses account for over 227 million years of health life lost and lead to an annual productivity loss of over US\$ 800 billion. It is crucial to prioritize addressing the main drivers of the disease burden in order to safeguard the health and socioeconomic well-being of the people.

My priority will be to provide support towards building the capacities of national and local health systems to effectively deliver equitable access to integrated packages of proven cost-effective health interventions for all ages.

2 Improve the quality of life and promote healthier living

In the African Region, the high disease burden, coupled with frequent emergencies, and natural and human-made disasters, adds pressure to the fragile health systems. Additionally, almost all countries in the Region are vulnerable to the health consequences of climate change.

Four key risk behaviours for NCDs: tobacco and alcohol use; physical inactivity and unhealthy diets are on the rise among young Africans, further testing the already overstretched health systems.

Urgent action is needed to address the determinants of health so as to mitigate declines in productivity and increases in health care expenses, failing which the socioeconomic costs will be high.

My priority will be to equip political leaders, health professionals and providers with innovative solutions, information and the tools they need to advocate effectively for health across other government sectors.

Priorities to accelerate the momentum – the “What”



3 Universal access to quality health services

Underpinning the Region’s capacity to cope with health emergencies, infectious diseases and chronic conditions is a resilient and sustainably financed health system, with the required infrastructure and qualified health workforce to deliver quality services. To achieve this, countries of the Region will have to undertake reforms in their health systems using a holistic approach based on primary health care, and applying innovative, gender-sensitive and equity-focused solutions.

In collaboration with the African Union and other partners, my priority will be to share evidence and best practices on effective context-specific health system reforms.

4 Safeguarding against threats

Each year, the African Region reports more than 100 acute public health events. While in many cases, such emergencies are preventable or controllable with proven public health interventions, without essential support, they will continue to cost lives, overwhelm health systems, and fuel socioeconomic disruption.

The COVID-19 pandemic has once again exposed the Region’s vulnerability in accessing health products. Most countries in the Region import 70–90% of the medicines consumed locally, and more than 98% of the vaccines administered. There are calls for self-reliance in the manufacturing of health products to address this critical gap and to be better prepared for future pandemics.

Governments should increase investments in health systems to meet the core functions of the International Health Regulations (IHR) for better preparedness and response in case of public health emergencies.

My top priority will be to work closely with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), AUDA-NEPAD, and other partners to prevent, detect and respond to the wide range of emergencies in the Region. This involves addressing immediate health needs, tackling underlying vulnerabilities, building system resilience and working towards self-reliance.

5 Foster partnerships for local solutions

Considering the scale, addressing the regional challenges will require strong collaboration across sectors and geographies. In this respect, international organizations, governments, academia, civil society, youth and the private sector will have a crucial role to play.

Promoting “African solutions to African problems” will require strong south-south cooperation to facilitate knowledge-sharing and foster effective collaboration among countries facing resource constraints and confronting health challenges. This effort must be supplemented and supported by local research initiatives to understand and design effective and culturally sensitive interventions.

My priority will be to work with the African Union and partners to coordinate regional initiatives, deepen collaboration and strengthen institutional capacities to generate evidence and cultivate homegrown solutions.

Operationalizing the vision through partnership and change – the “How”



Addressing the health challenges of the Region is as important as it is complex and will require innovative ways of thinking, stronger alliances and effective partnerships, as well as the adoption of technological advancements. Accordingly, I will leverage WHO’s unique position in health leadership, analysis, normative and technical cooperation to support countries. To provide responsive support that is mindful of the country-specific context and needs, I will adopt the following ways of working:



Advocacy and policy support

I will support countries in identifying emerging challenges and opportunities, such as investing in health systems to improve resilience to pandemics, reducing the burden of diseases through equitable access to cost-effective interventions, tackling modifiable risk factors and addressing climate threats through multisectoral actions and community engagement. This will include policy dialogues at the highest level of government and implementation support through the development of country-focused frameworks and instruments.



Health system resilience and reform

I will support countries in transforming modes of governance, financing mechanisms, multidisciplinary workforce and service delivery models built on the foundations of primary health care. With a focus on building resilience, efforts will be directed towards strengthening essential public health functions and institutionalized mechanisms for whole-of-society engagement. My focus will be to help countries in scaling up effective and sustainable innovations, develop practical guidance and tools, and facilitate the south-south exchange of knowledge and experiences in policy implementation.



Enhancing health security and achieving self-reliance

I will assist countries in strengthening their capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and other threats to health, through intersectoral approaches and in accordance with IHR. Strengthening surveillance, information sharing and quick response when the need arises will be key to safeguarding health security. Building on the lessons from current regional initiatives, I will continue to focus on building the capacity of local public health institutions and workforce and facilitate the mobilization of resources to support operations. In addition, I will work with partners to increase the Region’s capacity to manufacture life-saving medicines and vaccines and support climate mitigation and adaptation.



Innovation, digital transformation and leapfrogging

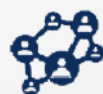
Build country capacities to harness the power of science and innovations to drive health impacts. This will include leveraging on the advances in smartphone connectivity, data management policies and data infrastructure in the Region to boost health system performance and leapfrog ahead. This will be combined with guidance to countries on expanding the use of digital health tools, developing national regulatory frameworks, achieving efficiency gains, enhancing quality and access to services, and improving patient satisfaction.

Operationalizing the vision through partnership and change - the “How”



Engage people in their own health

Work with government, healthcare providers and communities to inform people of healthier lifestyle choices, tools to support decisions about their health and well-being, and guidance on available health care resources. This will be accomplished, among others, through public campaigns, social media outreach and contacts with the health system, to truly cater to the needs of the diverse populations.



Leverage strategic partnerships for better health

Strengthen strategic coordination, collaboration and partnerships with the African Union, the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, United Nations specialized agencies and other global organizations active in the African Region, health professional associations, civil society, youth, faith leaders and the private sector. This will include active engagement with the regional economic communities - AMU, CEN-SAD, COMESA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC - to prioritize investments in health systems, including enhanced preparedness and response capacity to mitigate public health emergencies.

To deliver on the above-mentioned ways of working, I will ensure that WHO places emphasis on organizational agility, flexible and predictable financing, and a strong focus on driving impact in every country. These will be grounded on the principles of transparency and accountability, optimal use of financial and human resources, innovation and digital transformation, gender and geographical representation, open communications and a respectful work environment.

As we cross the halfway point to the 2030 Agenda, there can be no better time than now to embrace change and deepen regional cooperation among Member States and the regional economic communities to shape a better future for all people in the African Region.

Leading with humility and dignity



Dr Boureima Hama Sambo is a visionary leader with a more than 30 years of field, regional and global health experience. Dr Sambo is currently the WHO Representative (WR) to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Prior to his current position, he served as the WR to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. He started his public health career as a Chief Medical Officer in Tera Medical District in Niger. From this humble beginning, his aptitude, competency, and commitment has led him to assume strategic and executive leadership roles. Throughout his career Dr Sambo has been a champion for primary health care approach to address key health issues such as NCDs, health security, reproductive and child health, and equitable access to affordable health care.

Dr Sambo received his medical degree from the Faculté des Sciences de la Santé, University of Niamey, Niger, and his MPH and PhD in Epidemiology from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, USA. He also received a Certificate in Diabetology from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, USA.

Dr Sambo is the recipient of several awards and recognitions. He is committed to advancing public health research and dialogue and has authored or co-authored several peer-reviewed papers in professional journals.

Professional Experience *(selected)*

WHO Representative to The Democratic Republic of the Congo

January 2023-Present

WHO Representative to Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

September 2019-January 2023

Director Climate and Other Determinants of Health, WHO Headquarters

November 2017-September 2019

WHO Representative to Gabon

March 2013-November 2017

Programme Area Coordinator, NCDs, WHO AFRO, Brazzaville

October 2007 - March 2013

WHO Representative a.i. to Rwanda

June 2011-October 2011

Medical Officer, WHO AFRO, Brazzaville

July 2006-September 2007

Director, National Health Services, Ministry of Public Health, Niger

October 2004 June 2006

Associate Professor of Diabetology and Epidemiology, University of Florida, USA

March 2003-September 2006

Education

Ph.D. in Epidemiology,

University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma, USA

Diabetology, Certificate of Completion,

College of Medicine Endocrine Group, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, USA

MPH in Epidemiology,

University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, USA

Graduate Program in Epidemiology,

Johns Hopkins University, USA

Medical Degree,

Faculté des Sciences de la Santé, University of Niamey, Niger

Awards

Graduate Student Association Award,

University of Oklahoma Health Science Center

Academic achievement Award,

University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

Official recognition and National Award for excellent services provided in Health Care Quality in Dosso.

Awarded by the Minister of Health Niger

Stay in touch



We want a better tomorrow

We need a better tomorrow

We deserve a better tomorrow

Together we can shape a better tomorrow for Africa

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