

Situational analysis of community health systems in West Africa: Imperative to integrate social determinants of health

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Introduction

Recent global economic crises, pandemics, and climate change have exposed weaknesses in health systems, particularly at the community level. In response, the West African Health Organization (WAHO) conducted a regional situational analysis to inform updates to its community health strategy, emphasizing social determinants of health (SDH), multisectoral collaboration, and the “Health in All Policies” (HiAP) approach.

Methods

A cross-sectional study was carried out in 13 ECOWAS countries using a standardized tool developed by WAHO. Data were collected from September to November 2023 through self-administered questionnaires, document reviews, and stakeholder interviews. Thematic content analysis was used to identify key trends.

Results

All countries reported using data-driven approaches, but few had community-specific HRH systems or fully adopted MEAL frameworks. Two CHW categories were common—professionals and volunteers—though core competencies were often misaligned with SDH. Financing remained inconsistent, and HiAP strategies lacked full implementation.

Conclusion

Significant gaps exist in institutional frameworks, financing, and workforce capacity across West Africa. An integrated, SDH-focused model with strengthened CHW systems and multisectoral policies is critical to achieving equitable and effective community health outcomes.