

Editorial

“Together We Build Our Health”: Paving Way Forward Through Analyzing the Context and Ensuring Wide Participation in the First and Second Health Forums in Sudan

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The health forum is an innovative model for how governments can increase public participation and intersectoral collaboration that could be adapted in other contexts [1]. Toward the end of 2021, the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) activated the “Minister Advisory Council” after four years of dormancy. The council acts as an advisory group to the ministry of health and comprises 20 senior experts in health in Sudan. Together with 26 specialty councils, members proposed to conduct a health forum where the health sector discusses priority issues within the strategic plan. This *Sudan Journal of Health Sciences* (SJMS) editorial explores the policy process, initial outcomes, lessons learned from these two forums, and the way forward.

In March 2022, the FMOH held the first health forum in which the National Health Sector Reform and Recovery Strategic Plan (2022–2024) (NHSRR-SP) was presented. The first forum aimed to develop a catch-up road map for operationalizing the strategic plan to maintain at least the basic health services continuity. In addition, it aimed to ensure the engagement, contribution, and ownership of partners and health professionals. In July 2022, the second health forum was conducted. Its objective was first to ensure the alignment of the forum objectives with the strategic plan, statistically, and second, to ensure that the strategies set before are still valid, if not, then readjust it, as it was preceded by a fluid unstable context.

Sudan’s health system is overwhelmed by poverty-associated infectious diseases, nutritional deficiencies, restrictions, economic and management issues, and political instability [2, 3]. Additionally, COVID-19 exhausted the already fragile health system in 2020–2021 while working to prioritize and recover healthcare policies.

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Being pivotal in emergency preparedness, disease/disaster mitigation, and recovery, the FMOH in Sudan prioritized emergency care and primary healthcare to revive the health system to achieve Universal Health Coverage during the early transitional period. Gratefully, it was primarily supported by national and international partners, particularly during the COVID-19 period. However, still, Sudan's current health status needs more attention. Hence, this forum came to fruition in a noticeably short period under the theme that "we build our health together."

The preparation for the first health forum held on March 1–3, 2022 was extensive. Two committees were formulated; logistic and scientific. The scientific committee was responsible for developing templates, suggesting topics for papers, and reviewing and approving the draft technical papers. The process took more than four months of extensive meetings and technical work. By the time of the event, 17 technical reports across the six strategic projects were documented in a booklet published on the Sudan Health Observatory website [4].

The event concluded with 91 recommendations (Figure 1) for the six strategic projects. It ranged from immediate operational to long-term interventions across the strategic period (up to the end of 2024).

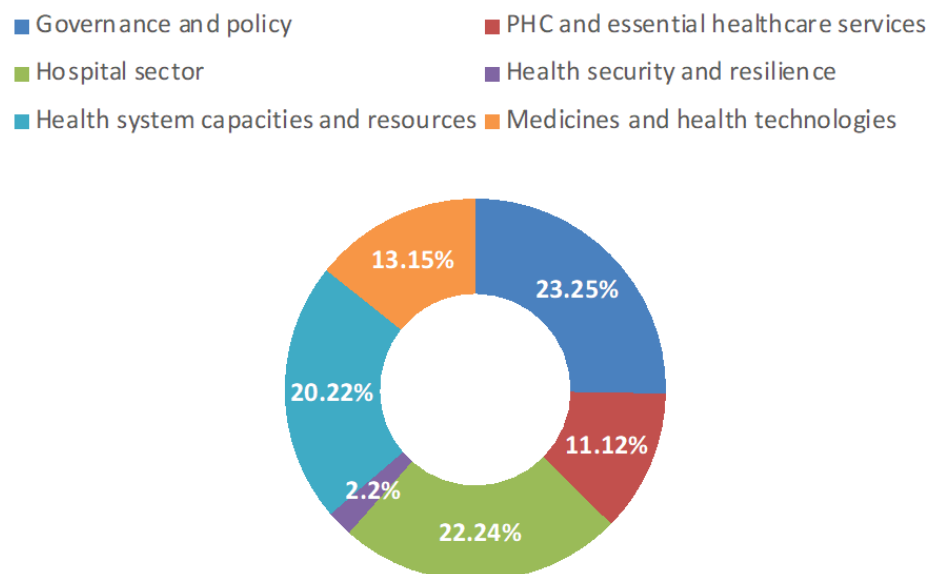


Figure 1: Grouping of the recommendations according to the thematic areas of the forum ($N = 91$).

Progress can be seen in the implementation of the 14 recommendations planned beyond the year's first half (Table 1). In addition, there are other recommendations designed to be in the other quarters. The progress in the performance has varied among the strategic projects, which was understandable given the context. However, the overall

TABLE 1: The progress of the recommendations planned for the second quarter 2022, up to June 2022*.

| # | Theme | Recommendation/Task | Task progress | Theme progress | Challenge | The way forward |
|----|------------------------|--|---------------|----------------|---|--|
| 1 | Theme one: Governance | Establish a mechanism to ensure institutionalization of the long-term vision including the recommendation of this forum. | 20% | 42% | Instability at the leadership and senior level. | Improvement of the institutional process through development of Institutional quality management system |
| 2 | Theme one: Governance | Development of comprehensive national M&E plan. | 25% | | Limited number of staff able to work at the development process along with competing priorities. | The committees started the revision and update on the existing M&E National Plan in August 2022. |
| 3 | Theme one: Governance | Assignment of the global health directorate as the focal entity for all the initiated partnerships. | 80% | | – | Relocate the coordination desks at the DGGH, HAC, and the states: A meeting with HAC and the states' representative to agree on the different roles and responsibilities regarding the partnership coordination. |
| 4 | Theme one: Governance | Activation of coordination mechanisms, especially intergovernmental bodies, and creation of joint secretariat for the various coordination mechanisms. | 25% | | Due to the lack of support to the forum secretariats from AICS, frequency of meetings to be conducted was affected negatively. The uncertainty of the political context affective the national forums activation and optimization of their use. | Develop a concept note on the joint secretariat role, follow-up mechanism, membership, location, etc. Decide on the need and feasibility on conducting an NPHCC meeting and arrange as needed. |
| 5 | Theme one: Governance | Revise the mandates, relationships, and structures of the various planning and M&E units at FMoH | 30% | | – | To finalize the concept and initiate discussion on the suggested arrangements. |
| 6 | Theme one: Governance | Develop a public–private partnership framework | (Q4) (10%) | | – | Recruit a consultant and start the process. |
| 7 | Theme one: Governance | Finalization and adoption of the accountability framework | (Q3) (20%) | | – | Reactivate the technical committee and develop the assessment tool. |
| 8 | Theme two: PHC | Reactivate the existing committee for the death and birth registration. | 100% | 90% | Interruption of the supply of registers to the states. Weak coordination at state level. | |
| 9 | Theme three: Hospitals | Finalization of the hospital sector benefit package. | 85% | 68% | A validation workshop for the benefit package had been conducted but package not finalized. | Expected to be finalized by the end of quarter three 2022. |
| 10 | Theme three: Hospitals | Expand the existing triage system in selected hospitals in selected states | 50% | | Although there are 10 selected states, <i>Aljazeera</i> is not selected, however, it is selected by the strategic plan for the first phase on the demonstration project. | |
| | Theme four | Health security, preparedness, response, and resilience against all hazards with a focus on COVID-19. | | | Nothing for the first six months | – |
| 11 | Theme 5: Capacities | Take the opportunity of donors' fund to generate the needed evidence for health. | 10% | 30% | Research priorities were not identified yet | The research database establishment/upgraded through support from donors. |

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| 12 | Theme five: Capacities | To revise and update Sudan Health Observatory website structure and contents | 50% | | Availability of the documents from FMOH and partners. | The upgrade is planned to take place by the end of the year. To be funded by the government which will enable the use of the government infrastructure. |
| 13 | Theme six: Pharmacy | Secure sufficient resources and domestic public funding to ensure the availability of essential medicines and vaccines. | 0% | 20% | Economic hardship at the country level. | – |
| 14 | Theme six: Pharmacy | Ensure availability of the lifesaving medication. | 80% | | – | – |
| 14 | Theme six: Pharmacy | Activate the national pharmaceutical coordination council to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the pharmaceutical sector. | 0% | | Technical secretariat needs to be assigned to activate the mechanism and for follow-up. | – |
| 16 | Theme six: Pharmacy | To strengthen the regulatory authority to play its roles. | 0% | | Low resources allocation. | – |

progress is around 49%. Most recommendations progress beyond their timeline (the first three months after the forum).

As Table 1 implies, the progress in the Primary Health Care (PHC) and Hospitals themes is good. In contrast, the capacities and pharmaceutical themes need hard work due to sector complexity and the multiplicity of the stakeholders. The main observation in the healthcare system is the fragmentation of the efforts exerted for improvement, causing inefficiency and leading to stagnation in some areas and even deterioration in others. Therefore, the fora call for an active collective and organized effort by all stakeholders to support all parts of the healthcare system strengthening and resilience guided by the strategic plan.

In conclusion, the health forums' theme "Together we build our Health" implies the need for collective efforts beyond the country's capacities. It is reaching out to everyone and appreciates the efforts of the diaspora around the globe. The theme has extended to the second forum and is expected to last, affirming that health is a shared responsibility that starts with the individual.

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