

REPORT



HEALTH POLICY COMMISSION GENERAL ASSEMBLY

📅 Wednesday, 13th March 2024

🕒 11:00AM 📍 Hybrid

Date: Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Time: 11:00 am

Duration: 2 hours

Venue: The Summit House, 6 Oba Elegushi Street, off Oba Adeyinka Avenue, Ikoyi, Lagos.

SESSION REPORT

Session Title: HEALTH POLICY COMMISSION GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Details of Discussants:

- Dr Mories Atoki, Facilitator, Health Policy Commission (HPC)
- Mr Patrick Ajah, Private Sector Co-Chair, Health Policy Commission (HPC)
- Dr Pamela Ajayi, President, Healthcare Federation of Nigeria
- Mr Slava Sazhin, Founder, National Telemedicine Association of Russia
- Dr Mariya Saleh, Thematic Lead, Public Health Thematic Group
- Dr Obinna Nnewuihe, Co-Thematic Lead, Health as a Business Thematic Group
- Dr Ayodele Cole Benson, Thematic Lead, Health as a Business Thematic Group

Moderated by:

- Dr Seyi Vincent, Anchor, Health Policy Commission (HPC)

Background

The Health Policy Commission was created in recognition of the importance of health in socio-economic and human capital development. Health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic underscored significant vulnerabilities in the health sector and showed the urgent need to invest in health and strengthen the resilience of the health system.

The overarching objective of the Policy Commission is to facilitate the adoption of the various NES recommendations as they relate to fostering equality in access to health, ensuring quality health services, and financial risk protection.

Whilst the health sector faces numerous challenges, the HPC has decided to prioritise two (2) critical policy areas required to accelerate the development of the health sector:

1. Facilitate the development of frameworks which articulate requirements for structuring sub-national health sector PPPs to guide and scale private sector investments/concessioning in primary healthcare.
2. Support the development of policies aimed at strengthening regulatory capacity in the health sector to ensure PPPs are carried out properly, providing quality services to meet population needs.

Context

In recognition of the need for support from sector experts, the Health Policy Commission hosted a General Assembly (GA) to engage experts on the proposed policy advocacy plans of the Policy Commission in 2024. The GA provided an opportunity for members of the Policy Commission and external stakeholders to learn about the activities of the Health Policy Commission, the Agenda for the year, and how to support the Policy Commission's research and policy advocacy efforts. The General Assembly served as a platform for agenda-setting for the year.

<p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>Mr Patrick Ajah, Private Sector Co-Chair, Health Policy Steering Committee</p>	<p>The HPC has a mandate to stimulate the country's commitment to building responsive and resilient health systems to enable the achievement of universal health coverage. In his opening remarks, Mr Patrick Ajah explained that achieving universal health coverage is essential to achieving health for all as a key objective of Nigeria's national health policy.</p> <p>The Health Policy Commission facilitates the adoption of various NES recommendations with regard to fostering equality in access to health, ensuring quality health services and financial risk protection, areas in which Nigeria has not done well. The Nigerian health sector faces a myriad of challenges that call for urgent redress to make universal health coverage possible. The sector grapples with chronic problems such as poor financial risk protection, insufficient public health financing and inefficient spending on healthcare, a weak regulatory environment, and inadequate private sector participation.</p> <p>Despite the persistent challenge in healthcare sector development, government expenditure often prioritises areas other than health and education. Additionally, the private sector tends to be excluded from government plans unless actively advocated for. With this, the HPC seeks to engage in research and advocacy to address these challenges and promote the achievement of universal healthcare coverage.</p> <p>Some of the items captured in the 2024 work plan of the HPC include the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve the policy environment for private sector engagement in the health sector through targeted advocacy and providing high-quality technical assistance for policy development. 2. Facilitate increased healthcare investment in Nigeria, by brokering relationships between key sector drivers in Nigeria's public and private sector. 3. Develop an advocacy paper for the Nigerian government addressing the need for improved efficiency in public health expenditure. <p>Mr Patrick Ajah expressed hope that these items would come to reality rather than just become under-the-table discussions. He affirmed that the General Assembly would provide an opportunity for members of the HPC to learn about its activities, the Agenda for the year, and how to support its research and policy advocacy efforts whilst also providing an opportunity for non-members to learn about the NESG and the HPC. The General Assembly would also serve as a platform to discuss important issues concerning the health sector and understand the direction the HPC needs to go this year, especially in terms of advocacy for the government to understand the need to partner with the private sector to drive the health care needs of the country.</p>
<p>Goodwill Message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Pamela Ajayi, President, Healthcare Federation of Nigeria • Mr Slava Sazhin, Founder, National Telemedicine Association of Russia 	<p>Dr Pamela Ajayi</p> <p>Dr Pamela Ajayi, the President of the Healthcare Federation of Nigeria (HFN), in her goodwill message, stressed the importance of the proposed two critical imperatives, improving the policy environment for private sector engagement and facilitating increased healthcare investment. Interestingly, these two are at the core of what the Healthcare Federation of Nigeria does day to day, as their mission is to improve access to quality, affordable healthcare through private sector activation. The importance of key stakeholders coming together to engage one another was also emphasised.</p>

More important than external interventions, however, would be for Nigerians to not only propose solutions but implement them. Nigeria is now fortunate to have an administration that has constantly and continuously prioritized healthcare and has begun rolling out and acting on strategies within the healthcare sector. Alluding to a recent HFN conference, Dr Pamela Ajayi noted that various key public officials, such as the Minister of State for Health and the Minister of Trade and Industry, amongst others, reiterated their commitment to improving the healthcare system and were keen to listen to all others who were present.

She reiterated her belief that the current administration is committed to improving healthcare and encouraged all present to take advantage of a friendly and willing administration. She then closed by stressing the importance of collaboration and thanked the NESG for its commitment to advancing healthcare in Nigeria.

Mr Slava Sazhin – Founder, National Telemedicine Association of Russia

Mr Sazhin began by thanking the NESG and Dr. Mories specifically for the invitation. He explained that there are several people in Russia who own pharma companies, clinics, hospitals, and several other types of healthcare businesses and want to invest in the Nigerian healthcare sector. It was noted that a significant reason for this interest in Nigeria was due to the size of the Nigerian population and economy. Therefore, it is important to work to make it easier for foreign money to come into the country, as there are investors in Russia that are willing and able to invest in Nigerian pharmaceuticals and the healthcare sector. He further expressed appreciation for the invitation and eagerness to facilitate Russian investment into the Nigerian economy.

Presentation by Think Tank Operations

Mr Sijuola Olanubi, Acting Head, Think Tank Operations, NESG

Mr Sijuola Olanubi welcomed the participants at the General Assembly and gave a presentation on the activities of the NESG, the expectations from new members and the value proposition for members of the Health Policy Commission. The presentation started with Kingdon's (1984) quote, "Policy change and impact comes about when three streams—problems, politics, and policies—connect. Each stream has its own forces acting upon it and ultimately influencing it. The streams do not just converge by chance but rather from consistent and sustained action by advocates", which explains the public-private dialogue (PPD) stance at the NESG and the need for sustained advocacy. The mission of the NESG as an economic think tank was also highlighted. The mission is to promote and champion the reform of the Nigerian economy into an open, inclusive and globally competitive economy. It was also noted that as one of the guiding principles, the NESG does not push individual Agenda but acts in the National interest.

The four strategic pillars and roles of the NESG are:

- Dialogue Partner: Driving Policy Change through Public Private Dialogue Platforms and Engagements; shaping policy through public debates
- Connector: the NESG brings stakeholders together and connects actors together to achieve the desired policy reform
- Watchdog: the NESG adopts an evidence-based approach in its policy advocacy.

- Intervener: the NESG has two centres saddled with performing interventions in the economy. The first is the Ernest Shonekan Centre, which drives legislative changes, while the Policy Innovation Centre focuses on social impact.

Further, the Public-Private Dialogue Platforms at the NESG were explained, with specific emphasis on the structure and mandate of the Policy Commissions.

NESG PPD STRUCTURES, PLATFORM AND FRAMEWORKS

Policy Commissions

- The NESG strategically functions within workgroups known as "The NESG Policy Commissions".
- The Policy Commissions (PC) comprise of public and private sector networks and experts who bring insight and shape our agenda on most strategic industry and crosscutting issues. The PCs also facilitate and fast track the adoption of various National Economic Summit (NES) recommendations.

Roundtables

- These are public and private dialogue platform established to champion a specific reform process. It is usually initiated by MOUs, specific Stakeholder drive, of Donor funding to archive a particular purpose. These roundtables also have their secretariat at the Abuja Offices.
- Roundtables can either be temporary platforms (e.g. the Fiscal Policy Roundtable, a 2year project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation) or Permanent roundtables like National Assembly Business Environment Roundtable NASSBER

Community of Practices

- The Group re-positioned its Policy Commissions in year 2019 and as part of that process created stand-alone platforms for three (3) key but easily marginalised groups: Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Gender related issues and Youth, so that they can together as communities of practice have a voice to champion and promote advocacy based on thematic areas of focus.

Thematic Working Groups

Thematic Working Groups are focus areas/sub-themes of a Policy Commission, Roundtable or Community of Practice. For instance, Mining and Manufacturing are the thematic groups of Manufacturing and Mining Policy Commission.

A thematic group will only be considered as one if it meets the requirement of having a minimum membership of 20 persons who are willing and available to advance dialogue on a subject matter of significance to the PC.

The presentation further highlighted the PPD Guiding Principles at the NESG, which are:

1. Mandate and Institutional Alignment
2. Structure and Participation
3. Champion(s) and Leadership
4. Facilitation and Management
5. Outputs
6. Outreach and Communication
7. Monitoring and Evaluation
8. Subnational
9. Sector-specific
10. Relevance to FDI
11. Post-conflict/disaster/crisis
12. Development Partners

The NESG also guides against the following Public Private Dialogue Risks:

1. Vested Interests
2. Not fully representative
3. Leading to a talk-shop
4. Risk of hijack or one-man show
5. Risk of being politicised
6. Risk of duplication of efforts

	<p>The presentation concluded with an outline of the responsibilities expected of volunteers at the NESG, particularly members of the Health Policy Commission and the value proposition of volunteering at the NESG.</p>
<p>About the Health Policy Commission</p> <p>Dr Mories Atoki, Facilitator, Health Policy Commission (HPC)</p>	<p>Dr Mories, in her presentation, reiterated that the Health Policy Commission is one of 12 policy commissions at the NESG. The HPC has two thematic groups: public health and health as a business. The overarching mandate is to serve as a platform for public-private conversations and engagement dialogues to drive reforms that guarantee health by all in the Nigerian health system.</p> <p>The policy commission endeavours to leverage as much of its resources and knowledge capital as possible to influence policies that aim to drive the Nigerian healthcare system forward. This forward movement would necessitate that health resources are evenly distributed and essential healthcare is accessible to all. The HPC's mandate subsumes the goal of attaining universal health coverage, which is one of the sustainable development goals Nigeria has also signed on to.</p> <p>Moreover, as a policy commission, the HPC integrates other recommendations that may relate to fostering equity in access to health, ensuring quality health services, and providing financial protection. The policy commission also aims to work with other policy commissions to foster enabling sectors for the health policy commission.</p>
<p>Activities of the Health Policy Commission: 2022 - 2024</p> <p>Dr Mariya Saleh, Thematic Lead, Public Health Thematic Group</p>	<p>Dr Mariya Saleh presented on the previous activities of the policy commission. Noting that the team had made significant progress over the last couple of years, she highlighted the following in her presentation:</p> <p><u>Activities of the Health Policy Commission: 2022</u></p> <p>A white paper was published in 2022 on Enhancing Local Production of Medicines and Vaccines. The white paper was catalytic in the engagements that took place in 2022. For instance, in 2023, the policy commission was able to engage the Federal Ministry of Health based on the white paper and participate in a review of Nigeria's vaccine policy, after which the Ministry communicated its willingness to collaborate with the HPC in reviewing both the policy and National Strategic Plan for the pharmaceutical sector.</p> <p>The HPC also engaged with the Director General of the National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development. This engagement included conversations about the requirements to enhance local production and what their institute could contribute. There was also a secondary engagement in the form of a collaborative meeting where the HPC was able to provide input on the critical role of vaccine research and development.</p> <p>The policy commission also submitted two policy memos to the national secretariat of the health reform committee: one on enhancing local production of medicines and vaccines and another on healthcare financing in Nigeria: realities, impediments, and recommendations.</p>

Activities of the Health Policy Commission: 2023

The HPC's activities in 2023 entailed a new focus on increasing investments in healthcare. This included a roundtable on the realities, impediments, and recommendations regarding healthcare financing for universal healthcare coverage in Nigeria. Another activity was the signing of an MOU between the NESG and UNICEF to address child poverty and protect child rights.

Also, the Health as a Business thematic group launched a white paper on Attracting Funding to the Nigerian Health Sector. This paper is intended to be a guide for investors, promoters, and analysts while also outlining opportunities and financing options in the Nigerian healthcare sector.

The Policy Commission also held an engagement meeting with the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission to explore more of the ICRC's role in structuring healthcare PPPs while also using this as an opportunity for invitations to the HPC's presummit activities and the NES 29 design workshop, which focused on private sector involvement in the delivery of primary health care.

In 2024, the policy commission had been working with the Healthcare Federation of Nigeria and PharmAccess in their partnership with the Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on a Dutch Life Sciences and Health mission to Nigeria at the end of February. This mission aimed to consolidate healthcare partnerships between the Netherlands and Nigeria while presenting opportunities for Dutch businesses to invest in the Nigerian healthcare sector.

Presentation of the Health Policy Commission's 2024 Work Plan

Dr Obinna Nnewuihe, Co-Thematic Lead, Health as a Business Thematic Group

Dr Obinna started his presentation by highlighting key issues that have been identified by the Health Policy Commission. These issues include the lack of availability of healthcare for millions of Nigerians and the challenge of financing this healthcare. Also, a significant portion of the country lacks any form of health insurance. Meaning they are left without any risk protection. The combination of these issues has brought the HPC to what the thematic groups are trying to address in the year 2024.

Health Policy Commission's Action Plans in 2024

The policy commission will continue to produce high-quality research papers that shape dialogue and inform policymaking in a way that is aligned with the NESG's mission. The research activities would also be an avenue to educate, create awareness, and facilitate high-level discussions with government officials. The policy commission plans to update some of the papers published recently related to local vaccine production and a general diagnostic report on healthcare financing. The policy commission also aims to use these updated publications to convene roundtables and engage stakeholders across the country and beyond.

Further, the policy commission will focus on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in primary healthcare. Also, the policy commission will be looking at the difference in recommendations that have already been proposed on how to actually support the implementation of PPPs, as

there are currently thousands of them across the country. While there are good intentions, some struggles arise when it comes to how exactly these ideas are going to work, the guidance for such projects and the lack of operational steps when going into a PP partnership. The policy commission is looking to understand and provide more structure for the facilitation, implementation, and operation of these partnerships.

The health as a business thematic group will be focusing on the issues that have been faced in the private sector when operating within the healthcare space in Nigeria. More specifically, the thematic group will be looking at regulatory frameworks related to investment and insurance coverage. As the policy commission continues to advocate for increased investment, there will also be effort put into understanding how to create and extract more value from what investment and capital already exists. How can the existing regulatory framework facilitate getting more health per naira as the system currently exists, increasing efficiency?

Another critical aspect of the 2024 workplan is the plan for intensified research into the regulatory framework and its impact on facilitating private sector involvement in the healthcare sector. This entails examining regulations governing the manufacturing of healthcare products, healthcare facilities, and medical devices to assess their compatibility with and support for enhanced private sector participation.

Alignment of the HPC with the Honourable Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare's 4-point Agenda

Dr Ayodele Cole Benson, Thematic Lead, Health as a Business Thematic Group

Dr Ayodele Cole Benson, the Thematic Lead of the Health as a Business Thematic Group, emphasised the significance of aligning the policy commission's work with the current priorities of the government. He stressed that advocating to the government requires understanding their perspective and priorities, as starting solely with our own agenda may not yield the desired results. Dr Benson highlighted the importance of coordinating effectively with the current Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare minister by identifying key areas within his four-point Agenda that the commission can support and align with.

The Minister's 4-point Agenda aims to (1) improve governance, (2) improve population health outcomes, (3) unlock the healthcare value chain, and (4) ensure health security for all Nigerians. There is a need to align with the minister's ideas leveraging the roles of the NESG as a dialogue partner, connector, watchdog, and intervener.

Within the Minister's broad-ranging initiatives, the enhancement of governance encompasses the entirety of the regulatory framework and the operational efficiency of its agencies. For instance, in Abuja, there exists a government policy stipulating that two similar healthcare institutions with overlapping functions cannot be located any less than 400 meters to each other. However, this regulation is often not enforced. Addressing this lack of implementation and enforcement of government regulations is crucial as we endeavour to enhance governance in the healthcare sector.

Improving population health outcomes entails considering various dimensions, including the social determinants of health. Beyond merely optimizing the efficiency of primary healthcare centres, there is a need to engage in discussions regarding policies concerning other social determinants of health. The HPC aims to collaborate with the Office of the Honorable Minister in addressing his four-point agenda areas as follows:

Four Point Agenda	NESG PILLARS			
	Dialogue Partner	Connector	Watchdog	Intervener
Improve governance	Convene relevant stakeholders at national levels to discuss issues around the quality of medicines, health products and services across board.	Connecting stakeholders of various sectors through roundtables dialogue, NES	Generate evidence for policies to strengthen governance	Institutional collaborations for systematic change towards the establishment of a health quality commission
Improve population health outcomes	Roundtables on social determinants of health and the effect on driving health inequities	Connecting sectors relevant to population health outcomes	Generate evidence for policies to strengthen population health outcomes	Institutional collaborations towards integrated delivery of population health interventions
Unlock the Healthcare Value Chain	Multisectoral round tables to define the healthcare value chain and identify enablers and bottlenecks .	Leverage the experience and network of NES PCs to remove bottlenecks in manufacturing and service delivery.	Generate evidence for policies supportive of the healthcare value chain	Drive collaborations to institutionalise enablers and remove bottlenecks
Health Security for all Nigerians	Leverage NESG Policy Commission platforms to sensitize MDAs involved in health security in Nigeria to live up to their responsibilities (environment, mining, etc.)	Facilitate interstate collaborations on disease surveillance.	Generate evidence for policies relevant to the health security of Nigeria	Institutional collaboration with NCDC across state boundaries and MDAs

Issues Identified	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Healthcare Regulation and Funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of adequate resources for effective regulation and funding in the healthcare sector. ○ Challenges in getting the private sector to understand and align with primary healthcare principles due to cost constraints. ○ Need for economies of scale and technology integration in primary healthcare for efficient resource management. 2. Referral Networks and Accountability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Absence of robust referral networks leading to suboptimal return on investment in healthcare. ○ Limited accountability in both public and private healthcare sectors, hindering proper service delivery. ○ Inadequate monitoring mechanisms due to resource constraints in the public sector. 3. Legislative Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenges in engaging with the legislature to craft laws that support healthcare reform and implementation. ○ Lack of understanding and interest from government officials towards necessary changes in healthcare policies and laws. ○ Need for direct engagement with the legislature to drive impactful healthcare reforms. 4. Policy Implementation and Coordination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inefficiencies in policy implementation, particularly regarding occupational health policies and existing population-based outcome policies. ○ Fragmentation and lack of coordination in policy development and refinement efforts. ○ Urgent need to refine existing policies and collaborate effectively with the government to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. 5. Health Security and Local Manufacturing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenges in ensuring health security and self-sufficiency in the production of generic medications. ○ Lack of a comprehensive national health security policy and framework. ○ Opportunities for collaboration between public and private sectors to support local medical research and development.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhanced Regulation and Monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allocate more resources and strengthen regulatory bodies to improve oversight and funding in the healthcare sector. ○ Develop clear guidelines and incentives for private sector involvement in primary healthcare, focusing on cost-effective solutions.

2. Referral Network Strengthening:

- Establish robust referral networks involving both public and private healthcare providers to enhance patient outcomes.
- Implement mechanisms for accountability and performance evaluation across the healthcare value chain.

3. Legislative Advocacy:

- Engage directly with the legislature to advocate for healthcare laws that support reform and address sectoral challenges.
- Educate and collaborate with government officials and legislators to drive impactful policy changes.

4. Policy Refinement and Coordination:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing healthcare policies and streamline efforts to refine and implement them effectively.
- Foster better coordination and communication between stakeholders to align policy goals with SDGs and national development agendas.

5. Health Security and Local Manufacturing Support:

- Develop a national health security policy framework to guide interventions and ensure self-sufficiency in medical production.
- Collaborate with industry stakeholders to incentivise local manufacturing of generics and support medical research and development initiatives.

Closing Remarks

**Dr Mories Atoki, Facilitator,
Health Policy Commission**

In her closing remarks, Dr Mories Atoki thanked all the participants and the Steering Committee members present at the General assembly for their valuable comments and contributions. She also noted that the Policy Commission will reflect on the discussions, the insights shared, and the comments for necessary action. The remarks concluded with a membership invitation to participants at the General Assembly who are yet to formally join the Health Policy Commission.