

Gathering information on eHealth projects and initiatives in Africa: an opportunity to get your work known

Professor Yunkap Kwankam reports how The African Union is trying to develop a knowledge base of eHealth projects.



African Health Ministers call on the eHealth community

The African Union Commission (AUC) organised a meeting of international eHealth experts in Addis Ababa on February 28–March 1. I had the privilege of attending the meeting.

The purpose was to respond to a request from African health ministers on the subject of coordination and harmonisation of eHealth projects and initiatives on the continent. At the fourth session of the Conference of African Ministers of Health (CAHM4) held in Addis Ababa on 4–8 May 2009, the ministers had deliberated on the subject by considering a report entitled 'Overview of eHealth and Telemedicine in Africa'. They then made a crucial request to the eHealth community. The report of the conference states:

- 'The AUC to take the lead in the coordination and harmonisation of the existing eHealth and telemedicine initiatives on the continent.
- The AUC, in collaboration with relevant partners, to undertake the development of a policy framework required to effectively implement telemedicine and eHealth initiatives/programmes in Africa.
- Ministers in charge of Health and Information Technologies review legislative frameworks and policies on health and ICT.'

In responding to this request, the assembled experts recognised that this was a daunting task, not least because of the need to gather information on eHealth projects and initiatives in Africa, as there is no existing repository of such information.

Get your project registered

One of the key conditions for the success of this enterprise is that its promoters, primarily the African Union and the World Health Organization, get good

Professor S Yunkap Kwankam is Executive Director of the International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH) and CEO of Global eHealth Consultants (GeHCs).

information on what eHealth projects are on the ground throughout Africa. Coordination and harmonisation would lose their meaning if we do not even know which projects and initiatives are there to be coordinated and harmonised. It is, therefore, imperative that we identify all projects currently being undertaken and those planned for the near future. One of the best ways to do so is for the operators of existing projects and those planning future projects to provide information on their work to the African Union. This is where you, the reader, come in. Send in a description of each of your eHealth projects, and share this request for information with other people you know who are engaged in eHealth activities.

Spread the word

In an undertaking of this type, it is better to err on the side of too much, rather than too little, information. We are better off including many projects that are not eHealth than to leave out any efforts that are eHealth. So, if it involves information and communication technology and it is in the health sector, then briefly write it up and send it in. Many thanks in advance for your contribution. A knowledge base of these activities can only benefit not only your future projects, but also foster productive collaborations among eHealth actors for the betterment of health on the continent.

The focal point for this work is the AUC Department of Social Affairs, who organised the Addis meeting. Send your inquiries to them. A collaborative workspace for this effort has been set up at <http://sites.google.com/site/aeuehealth>. Relevant documents are posted on the site and a threaded discussion is also available. Both could benefit from your involvement. More information is available on the site on how to participate in the work.

Contact information:
 Directorate of Social Affairs
 Dr Olawale I Maiyegun
 PO Box 3243
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
 Email: MaiyegunO@africa-union.org