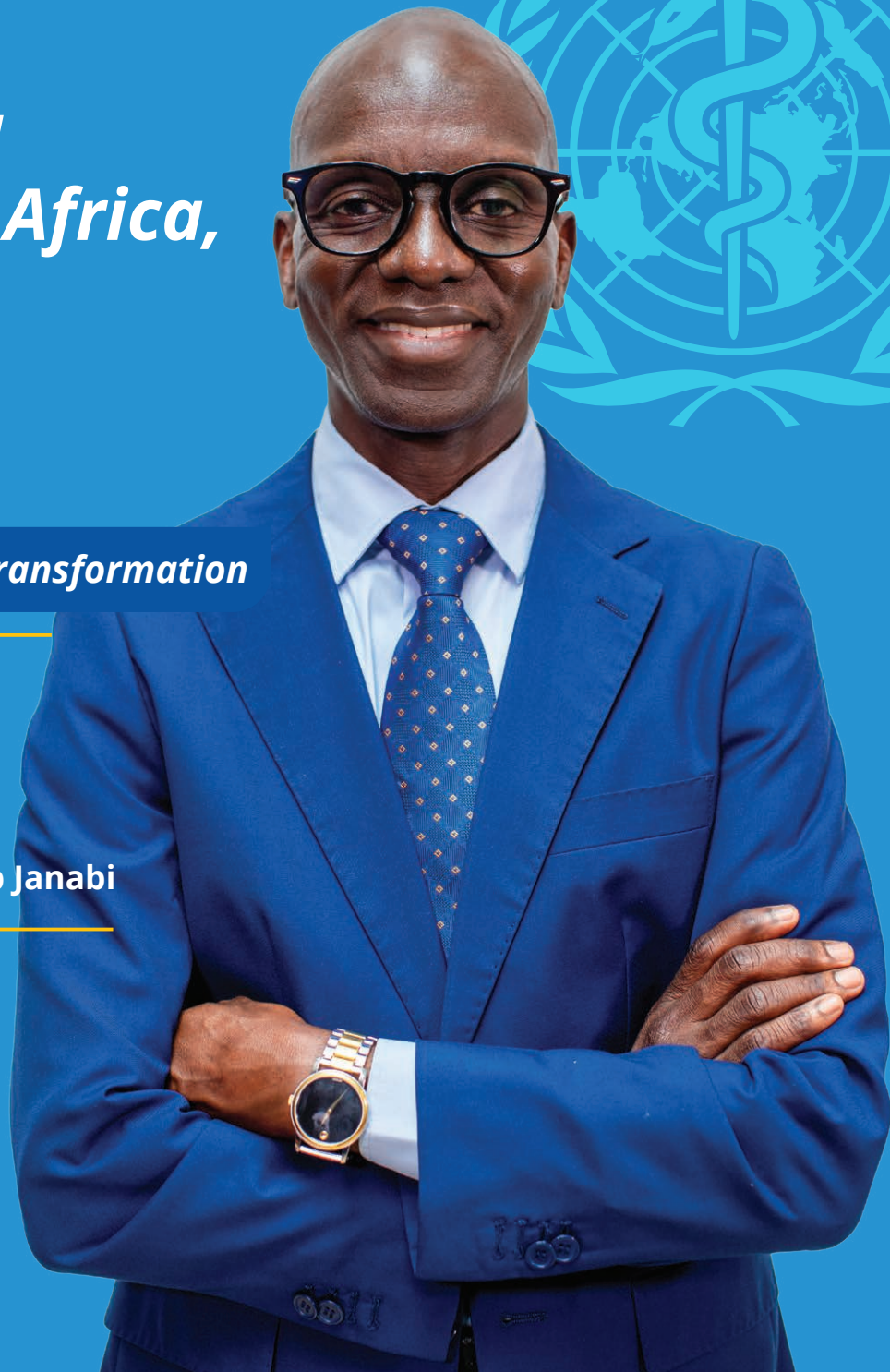


***Building a
Healthier Africa,
Together!***

A Manifesto for Transformation

Dr Mohamed Yakub Janabi



My Vision for Transformation

Africa is a continent of resilience, diversity, and opportunity. A continent that has faced tremendous health challenges but has also achieved remarkable progress. A continent with the opportunity to come together with a clear vision to achieve transformational progress.

At this pivotal moment in the midst of extraordinary uncertainty and challenge it is more important than ever that we take ownership of our future.

With no illusions as to the scale and significance of the task ahead, I am truly humbled to submit my candidacy for the new Regional Director for Africa of the World Health Organisation.

Last year, my friend and colleague Dr. Faustine Ndugulile presented a plan for transformation to our continent. His vision earned the confidence of his fellow Africans before his untimely passing. I feel a responsibility to honour his memory, not through words, but through action: by advancing the vision he shared for Africa's future. My agenda, therefore, is built on these same, strong foundations, and led by the same goal to transform healthcare and health outcomes on this continent, together.

I believe that together:

- We can ensure that healthcare is not a privilege, but a fundamental right for all.
- We can dedicate ourselves towards a bottom-up approach to universal healthcare targeting primary healthcare and prevention, rather than relying on late-stage intervention.
- We can build resilience as a continent, preparing us for the challenges coming down the line: from future pandemics, to climate change, to antimicrobial resistance.
- We can advance a "One Health" approach working across state boundaries against borderless threats.
- We can modernise our institutions, equipping them with cutting-edge methods and resources.
- We can regain our sovereignty working collaboratively to take ownership over our responsibilities and outcomes.

With these missions in mind, I hope to be able to bring my own experiences and expertise to bear on the unique set of challenges we face. Over the course of my professional life, I have gained experience across many different contexts, countries, and indeed continents. I have worked across the healthcare sector as a clinician, scientist, public health leader from the front lines of primary care to the management of public health institutions.

For the last 20 years, I have played a leading role in transforming Tanzania's healthcare system serving as a health diplomat and a senior advisor to the highest offices in the land, working with Presidents and other leaders to build state-of-the-art public health capabilities in Tanzania and beyond.

With the trust of my President and the people of Tanzania, and the goodwill of my brothers and sisters from across Africa, I pledge to work relentlessly for our shared cause. To transform an institution which has reached a critical crossroads in its history to make it work better for all Africans.

Together, we can build a healthier, more secure, and more prosperous Africa.

Policy Platform

1

Universal Health: Investing in our foundations

The African population is the world's most underserved in terms of access to healthcare. Addressing these gaps serves both our shared humanitarian values and economic interests: strategic investments in prevention and early interventions offer substantial returns in both improved health outcomes and resource efficiency. The advancement of universal healthcare across the continent represents not merely an expenditure but a foundational investment in Africa's long-term prosperity and human development.

2

Resilience: Neutralising future threats

Africa's future wellbeing depends on proactively addressing emerging health challenges. By taking measured steps today, the continent can mitigate the significant human and economic costs of predictable crises. Strengthening health systems requires collaborative investment across multiple dimensions: enhancing climate resilience, developing robust emergency response capabilities, addressing antimicrobial resistance through coordinated strategies, reinforcing health security frameworks, and adapting to ongoing demographic transitions.

3

Universal Health: Investing in our foundations

The evolution of WHO-AFRO presents an opportunity to build an institution that effectively addresses the continent's unique health challenges while maximising the contributions of Africa's talented healthcare professionals. Through thoughtful assessment and strategic enhancement, we can foster an organization characterized by competence, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to regional needs. By integrating diverse perspectives from clinical practice, public health education, and healthcare leadership, WHO-AFRO can implement innovative approaches that honour existing foundations while embracing necessary advancements. Together, we can work toward an organisation that fully embodies Africa's aspirations for excellence in health governance and service delivery.

4

Ownership: From Dependence to Sovereignty

The evolving global landscape underscores the importance of Africa proactively advancing its health sovereignty. There exists growing recognition that sustainable health outcomes require strengthened continental leadership in health governance frameworks. While international partnerships remain valuable, strategic prioritization of self-reliant systems could enhance Africa's capacity to direct health agendas aligned with regional priorities. If WHO-AFRO were a company, Africans would be minority shareholders. The continent must meet the urgency of this occasion and play an increasingly central role in determining health trajectories that reflect continental needs and aspirations.

Building a Healthier Africa, Together: Pillars and Priorities

This acts as a preview to the policy pillars set out in the next four sections:

1. **Universal Health:** Investing in our foundations

- 1.1. Universal Health Coverage
- 1.2. Primary Healthcare
- 1.3. The Tech-Health-Energy Nexus
- 1.4. Maternal and Child Care
- 1.5. Immunisation
- 1.6. Public Awareness Campaigns
- 1.7. Financial Investment
- 1.8. Sustainable Development Goals

2. **Resilience:** Neutralising future threats

- 2.1. Climate Resilience
- 2.2. Health Security
- 2.3. Regional Collaboration
- 2.4. One Health Initiative
- 2.5. Emergency Response/Preparedness
- 2.6. Anti-Microbial Resistance
- 2.7. Demographic Change

3. **Modernisation:** Harnessing the continent's potential

- 3.1. Enhancing Operational Efficiency
- 3.2. Healthcare Workforce Development
- 3.3. Member State-Centric Approach
- 3.4. Expertise Sharing
- 3.5. Best Practice Documentation
- 3.6. Increasing Accountability and Transparency

4. **Ownership:** From Dependence to Sovereignty

- 4.1. Reforming Assessed Contributions
- 4.2. Creating Innovative Funding Mechanisms
- 4.3. Sovereignty in Health Security
- 4.4. Building Stronger Regional and Global Alliances
- 4.5. Playing a More Assertive Role on the International Stage

1. Universal Health: Investing in our foundations

1.1 Universal Health Coverage

Expanding accessibility to essential health services whilst addressing financial barriers remains a fundamental challenge. Over 400 million people in Africa currently face financial obstacles to healthcare. The continent's UHC Service Coverage Index stands at a concerning 46, well below the global average of 68, exacerbated by a shortage of healthcare workers and high out-of-pocket health expenditure. The WHO's vision of universal health coverage must be our guiding principle to ensure no one is left behind.

1.2 Primary Healthcare

Strengthening Primary Healthcare stands as the cornerstone of Universal Health Coverage. This necessitates improvements in governance, health infrastructure, and workforce development to deliver comprehensive and accessible care. The Ouagadougou Declaration (2008), alongside the Alma-Ata (1978) and Astana (2018) Declarations, provides robust frameworks for strengthening PHC and building resilient, people-centred health systems across the continent.

1.3 The Tech-Health-Energy Nexus

Africa has a unique opportunity to leapfrog traditional infrastructure constraints through innovative applications of technology and energy solutions. Digital health platforms, mobile clinics powered by renewable energy, and telemedicine can bridge healthcare access gaps in regions where conventional infrastructure development would take decades. The inadequate access to reliable electricity directly impacts healthcare delivery across the continent. Medical facilities without consistent power cannot operate essential equipment, maintain cold chains for vaccines, or provide emergency services at night. By prioritising electrification and digitisation of health facilities, particularly in rural areas, we can dramatically enhance service delivery.

1.4 Maternal and Child Care

An area requiring substantial action is the reduction of maternal and infant mortality through improved access to quality maternal and child health services. The sobering reality is that Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for over 70% of global maternal deaths and more than half of under-five deaths, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions in this sphere.

1.5 Immunisation

Immunisation represents a vital component of comprehensive healthcare provision. The power of vaccines to eradicate diseases cannot be overstated, and robust immunisation programmes must be prioritised and expanded throughout the region to protect vulnerable populations and build community resilience against preventable diseases.

1.6 Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns are essential for promoting healthy lifestyles and preventive care, thereby reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases. As non-communicable diseases continue to pose a more serious health risk to Africa, our approach to public awareness campaigns must pivot to placing greater focus on disseminating information relevant to early stage prevention of non-communicable diseases. Making health information accessible to the public in simple, non-medical language is crucial for driving meaningful change and encouraging better health choices.

1.7 Financial Investment

The most impactful approach to addressing challenges associated with Universal Health Coverage lies in investing in prevention and early-stage intervention strategies. This approach not only saves lives but proves economically advantageous in the long term. Continental universal healthcare must be framed as an investment in Africa's future prosperity.

1.8 Sustainable Development Goals

Ensuring health and well-being for all, as outlined in the third goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development by the UN, requires substantial public sector investment and accelerated action by governments and partners across the continent. Meeting these targets demands cooperation, innovative funding mechanisms, and commitment to health as a fundamental right.

2. Resilience: Neutralising future threats

2.1 Climate Resilience

The health risks posed by climate change merit focused attention, necessitating the integration of climate adaptation into health systems and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration to mitigate these risks. Member States should consider their national contexts and legislation to strengthen the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy on Health, Environment, and Climate and the WHO Road Map. Climate-resilient health systems must be developed that can withstand extreme weather events, changing disease patterns, and resource scarcity.

2.2 Health Security

Strengthening pandemic preparedness remains a key priority for enhancing Africa's capacity to manage health emergencies. This involves supporting ongoing discussions on the pandemic agreement through the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB). African nations must take an active role in shaping global health security frameworks to ensure they address the continent's unique challenges and priorities.

2.3 Regional Collaboration

Regional partnerships play a vital role in fostering coordinated health responses across Africa. Member States must strengthen cross-border cooperation through established regional bodies to facilitate swift and effective response mechanisms when threats emerge. By pooling resources, sharing expertise, and aligning strategic approaches, African nations can build resilient systems capable of addressing complex health emergencies that transcend national boundaries. This collaborative framework must be underpinned by mutual trust, transparency, and shared responsibility to ensure sustainable health security across the continent.

2.4 One Health Initiative

The One Health Initiative represents a holistic approach that integrates human health, livestock management, industrial practices, and microbial surveillance within a unified framework. African nations should continue to adopt and implement this interdisciplinary approach to address the complex interconnections between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. The continent's unique ecosystems and agricultural practices make this approach particularly relevant for tackling zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and environmental health determinants. Implementing the One Health paradigm requires breaking down traditional sectoral barriers to foster meaningful collaboration between health, agriculture, environment, and other relevant stakeholders at national and regional levels.

2.5 Emergency Response/Preparedness

The implementation of the reviewed International Health Regulations (IHR) of 2005 is essential for global health security. A significant challenge remains the reluctance of many Member States to report health emergencies promptly due to fear of punitive actions. The IHR aims to provide a legal framework for the international community to prevent and respond to cross-border public health risks, emphasising collaboration, transparency, trust, and mutual support rather than punishment. Early emergency preparedness has consistently proven effective in mitigating health emergencies and minimising their impacts.

2.6 Anti-Microbial Resistance

Given the growing concern of antimicrobial resistance across the continent, supporting the Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS) and ensuring continued reporting of resistance and consumption data is paramount. African nations must develop comprehensive strategies to combat antimicrobial resistance through improved stewardship, research, surveillance, and public awareness.

2.7 Demographic Change

Africa's youthful population presents both opportunities and risks, including increased vulnerability to substance misuse, unprotected sex, sleep deprivation, mental health issues, and alcohol abuse, while simultaneously necessitating a healthcare system that is responsive to the needs of an ageing population. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure is crucial to address both infectious diseases affecting the young and chronic conditions impacting older adults, with an emphasis on Primary Health Care and Universal Health Coverage. Social services should be enhanced to provide geriatric care, chronic disease management, and supportive care networks tailored to an ageing population. Public awareness campaigns should promote healthy lifestyles and preventive care to mitigate the burden of non-communicable diseases across all age groups. Additionally, advocating for long-term care facilities and services should be prioritised in order to ensure dignity and quality of life for older adults as demographic shifts continue to reshape societal needs.

3. Modernisation: Harnessing the continent's potential

3.1 Enhancing Operational Efficiency

Streamlining operations at WHO-AFRO presents valuable opportunities to align resources with programmatic priorities. Thorough evaluation of existing workflows could identify areas for administrative streamlining and adoption of innovative management approaches. Through collaborative engagement with the Brazzaville Secretariat and member state representatives, there exists potential to strengthen institutional frameworks. Continuous improvement of regional office operations remains a strategic priority for optimising health outcomes across African nations.

3.2 Healthcare Workforce Development

Strengthening Africa's healthcare workforce is fundamental to achieving universal health coverage. Community health workers represent an essential bridge between formal health systems and underserved communities, particularly in rural and remote areas. These frontline workers deliver primary care services, conduct disease surveillance, and provide health education where traditional healthcare infrastructure is lacking. Investing in community health workers must be prioritised as a relatively low cost solution to extend healthcare reach effectively.

3.3 Member State-Centric Approach

The diverse nature of the African continent demands tailored strategies to meet the specific needs and contexts of each country. One-size-fits-all approaches fail to address the unique challenges faced by different nations. Aligning with national health priorities ensures relevance and effectiveness of WHO initiatives. Close coordination with national health authorities is crucial for achieving GPW14 goals and improving healthcare systems, creating a true partnership that respects sovereignty whilst providing valuable technical support.

3.4 Expertise Sharing

Africa possesses a wealth of healthcare expertise that must be leveraged through deliberate knowledge exchange mechanisms. Sharing expertise among member states fosters collaboration and mutual learning, preventing the isolation of valuable insights. Optimising regional professional networks facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices across borders. Establishing virtual professional colleges enhances skills and capacity building, creating communities of practice that transcend geographical limitations and institutional barriers.

3.5 Best Practice Documentation

Success must be studied and replicated. Collecting and sharing successful interventions helps identify and promote effective solutions that can be adapted to various contexts. Documenting lessons learnt is equally important to avoid repeating mistakes and to continuously improve future strategies. Replicating and scaling proven solutions across the continent maximises impact and accelerates progress towards shared health goals, creating a multiplier effect for successful interventions.

3.6 Increasing Accountability and Transparency

Trust forms the foundation of effective collaboration between WHO-AFRO and its stakeholders. Ensuring the organisation operates transparently builds confidence among Member States, partners, and the public. Responsiveness to the needs of Member States and partners demonstrates a commitment to serving Africa's health priorities. Transparency and accountability are fundamental principles that ensure WHO operates efficiently and effectively in service of its mission, with clear metrics for success and regular reporting on progress.

4. Ownership: From dependence to sovereignty

4.1 Reforming Assessed Contributions

Advancing innovative domestic financing mechanisms represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen health systems across Africa. WHO's work touches hundreds of millions of lives across the African continent. Every programme, every initiative, and every allocation of funding represents much more than statistics or budget line items. Each decision means a life protected, a life saved, or a life lost prematurely. Finding alternative ways to fund the organisation is essential.

Currently, Member States' contributions to WHO-AFRO come primarily through assessed or voluntary contributions. Regrettably, voluntary contributions constitute 80 percent of the budget. While voluntary contributions (constituting approximately 80% of WHO-AFRO's budget) reflect valuable partner engagement, they often align with specific programmatic priorities. Conversely, assessed contributions generally comprise around 20 percent, sometimes even less. According to the WHO African Region Health Expenditure Atlas 2023, only a handful of countries met the recommended threshold of spending a minimum of £249 per capita on health.

4.2 Creating Innovative Funding Mechanisms

These figures underscore the need for innovative funding mechanisms. Reliance on traditional funding sources, and on traditional partners, is insufficient. Alternative financing methods should be explored and implemented for health initiatives to ensure every individual receives the care they deserve. Various mechanisms such as debt swaps, endowments, blended funding, climate adaptation, and other innovative funding sources should be explored. Resources must be mobilised, investment attracted, and sustainable development prioritised to bridge the funding gap and improve health outcomes across the region.

4.3 Sovereignty in Health Security

Strengthening Africa's health sovereignty is necessary for true resilience against future pandemics and health emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the continent's vulnerability when depending on external suppliers for vaccines, therapeutics, and critical medical equipment. Africa should prioritise building indigenous capacity for vaccine research, development, and production to ensure self-reliance during health crises. This includes investing in regional biopharmaceutical manufacturing hubs, transferring technology and know-how, and developing regulatory frameworks that support local innovation while maintaining international standards.

4.4 Building Stronger Regional and Global Alliances

Building stronger alliances with regional and global partners to leverage resources, expertise, and technical support in achieving Africa's health goals should be a priority. This includes empowering Regional Collaboration by strengthening partnership with the African Union, Africa CDC, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Sub-Regional Health Organisations and national governments. Cross-border health initiatives are necessary in order to address shared challenges, such as pandemics and supply chain disruptions.

4.5 Playing a More Assertive Role on the International Stage

Africans should become majority shareholders in WHO-AFRO by contributing more substantially. The recent proposal for a 20% increase in assessed contributions (budget 2026/2027) merits support, but budget allocations should be tailored to country-specific priorities. Close coordination with national health authorities is crucial for achieving GPW14 goals and improving healthcare systems.

Working closely with other WHO regions and international partners is vital to strengthen healthcare systems and achieve sustainable health outcomes for all. This approach will give Africa ownership and a voice in this essential organisation. By diversifying funding sources, a more resilient financial foundation can be built. Collaborating with a wide range of partners will bring fresh perspectives, resources, and expertise. This comprehensive approach will enable the continent to address pressing health challenges more effectively and sustainably.



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