

**WHX**

Lagos

Formerly Medico West Africa

Co-located with:

**WHX Labs**

Lagos

Formerly Medlab West Africa

A portrait of a smiling Black woman with curly hair, wearing a white lab coat and a stethoscope. She has her arms crossed and is holding a white folder. The background is a bright, out-of-focus clinical setting.

**Empowering Women's Health  
Through Policy and Innovation  
in West Africa**



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# Empowering Women's Health Through Policy and Innovation in West Africa

**E**mpowering women's health involves equipping women and girls with the tools to make informed decisions about their well-being. This includes access to education, decision-making power, medical care, and healthcare resources.

Driving change through policy requires increased R&D funding, incentivising innovation, fostering cross-sector partnerships, and investing in female researchers to lead the healthcare field.

Notable advancements include self-administered family planning tools, single-dose HPV vaccines, and AI-powered cancer diagnostics.

## The Current Landscape of Women's Health in West Africa

Women's health in West Africa stands at a pivotal moment, with progress as well as challenges defining key areas such as maternal health, reproductive health, mental health, nutrition, and cancer.

### Maternal Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest maternal and child mortality rates globally, accounting for 70% of all maternal fatalities. Amidst these challenges, investing in maternal and child health can reduce the mortality rate and open economic opportunities.



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Sierra Leone has the highest maternal mortality ratio globally, with 1,360 mothers dying for every 100,000 live births, underscoring the critical state of maternal and child health in the country.

Innovative interventions like Heat-Stable Carbetocin for postpartum haemorrhage prevention in low-resource settings like Sierra Leone have saved lives in the region.

### Reproductive Health

Youth-focused initiatives in West African countries address reproductive health challenges. Comprehensive sexuality education, peer education, cash transfers, mass media campaigns, and youth-friendly centres aim to empower the youth. MSI Reproductive Choices, through the UK-funded Women’s Integrated Sexual Health 2 Lot 1 project, has delivered essential sexual plus reproductive healthcare services to millions across six West and Central African countries.

### Mental Health

Socioeconomic, cultural, along with security challenges heighten adolescent mental health concerns. Addressing these issues demands policies, robust guidelines, and capacity-building efforts. Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger offer valuable insights into adolescent mental health. Sierra Leone has the highest maternal mortality ratio globally,

“Burkina Faso faces a severe shortage of mental health professionals, with only 103 professionals available to serve the entire population, highlighting a critical gap in mental healthcare access.”

with 1,360 mothers dying for every 100,000 live births, underscoring the critical state of maternal and child health in the country. Health research, reflecting diverse socio-cultural contexts plus healthcare systems.

### Cancer in Women

West African women face high cancer risks, particularly cervical and breast cancer. The region reports the second-highest breast cancer incidence in Africa, with aggressive triple-negative breast cancer prevalence exceeding 40%.

Cervical cancer remains the second most common cancer among women, with an incidence of 13.9 per 100,000 and a mortality rate of 9.4 per 100,000. These alarming statistics underline the urgent need for targeted interventions.

### Burden of Cervical Cancer - Nigeria

	Incidence	Mortality
Annual number of new cases/deaths	12,075	7,968
Crude rate	11.9	7.84
Age-standardised rate	18.4	13.2
Cumulative risk 0-74 years (%)	1.86	1.42
Ranking of cervical cancer (all years)	2nd	2nd
Ranking of cervical cancer (15-44 years)	2nd	2nd

### Crude Incidence Rates of HPV-related Cancers - Nigeria

Cancer	Male	Female
Cervical cancer	-	11.9
Anal cancer	0.65	0.65
Vulva cancer	-	0.91
Vaginal cancer	-	0.16
Penile cancer	0.02	-
Oropharyngeal cancer	0.14	0.11
Oral cavity cancer	0.72	0.53
Laryngeal cancer	0.61	0.15

Source: hpvcentre.net : Human Papillomavirus and Related Cancers, Fact Sheet 2023

## Challenges and Opportunities to Advancing Women's Health

### Healthcare Resources and Digital Infrastructure

A shortfall of well-equipped facilities and trained personnel, particularly in rural areas, has impeded the effectiveness of healthcare service delivery in West African countries.

Digital innovations such as telemedicine offer potential solutions. However, such innovations need to be backed with high-speed internet connectivity and digital literacy rates for widespread adoption.



**Gabbi Health Nigeria provides EHR platform / TeleHealth services for healthcare providers, enhancing practice management, patient communication, and data access.**

### Socioeconomic Barriers and Social Media

West Africa faces challenges in women's health empowerment due to structural issues in public facilities such as a lack of gender-responsive infrastructure.

Smart technologies like mobile apps can overcome geographical barriers and provide information on women's health covering contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

For instance, the Women's Health and Education Programme in Nigeria uses social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to disseminate reproductive health content, which fosters personal connections in addition to sharing vital information.

### The Role of Policy in Advancing Women's Health

Public-Private and Multilateral Partnerships have emerged as key drivers of change. Nigeria's federal government's partnership with Siemens Healthineers has improved cancer care through advanced technology and training.

The Ouagadougou Partnership aims to double contraceptive users in Francophone West Africa to 13 million by 2030.

### Coalition for Women's Health in Africa (COWHA)

advocates for equitable healthcare and optimal well-being for women and girls. It integrates private and non-state actors to support health equity initiatives.

Between 2011 and 2021, the OP reached 4,077,000 new contraceptive users, preventing 18,848,000 unplanned pregnancies, 6,697,500 unsafe abortions, and 63,740 maternal deaths.

### GrOW–West Africa Initiative

fosters gender equality and economic empowerment in the region. It supports countries in rebuilding socio-economic systems post-COVID-19 and preparing for a low-carbon economy.

### African Women in Digital Health (AWIDH)

initiative championed digital health policies centered on women's well-being. It focuses on capacity building and female entrepreneurship. Badienou Gokh Initiative strengthens maternal and child health through training women as community health leaders. Women in Healthcare Network (WIHCN) focuses on gender equality and skill enhancement in the healthcare sector.

**The other policies include:**

- **Community Health Workers (CHWs) in Ghana** deliver essential services such as immunisation, health education, and family planning, which bridge gaps in primary care.
- **The Regional Contraceptive Early Warning System** manages contraceptive stock data across ECOWAS countries to prevent shortages.
- **The WHO's 90-70-90 targets** aim to improve HPV vaccination, cervical cancer screening, and treatment.
- **ARPA-H's Sprint for Women's Health** allocates USD 100 million to research and innovation in women's health.

These strategic policies and partnerships demonstrate how focused investment and collaboration empower women's health in West Africa, creating pathways for sustainable progress and equality.



## Global Gaps and Recommendations for Improvement

The women's health gap stems from four critical factors: insufficient understanding of biological differences, systematic underestimation of health issues, barriers to service delivery, and inadequate investment in preventive care.

These disparities vary across regions and income levels, deeply impacting women's health, education, and economic opportunities.

### Family Planning

Access to family planning remains a significant challenge in West Africa. Only 13% of married women aged 15-49 use any form of family planning. Barriers include limited information, fear of side effects, cultural norms, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure.

Policy constraints and insufficient funding further compound the issue. The lack of access affects women's health, educational attainment, and economic empowerment, perpetuating a cycle of poverty as well as inequality.

### Reproductive Health Care

Systems in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) remain fragile, with high maternal mortality ratios accounting for 94% of global maternal deaths. Financial barriers prevent many women from accessing necessary healthcare services.

Interventions like the Strategic Cooperation Agreement between the Wellbeing Foundation Africa and GE HealthCare show promise.

In Nigeria, GE HealthCare has introduced eight portable Vscan ultrasound devices to enhance maternal and fetal outcomes, offering a model for scalable solutions in similar contexts.

### Adolescent Girls

Adolescent girls in West Africa face unique challenges, which includes limited access to resources, financial institutions, and decision-making opportunities.

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9 out of 10 new HIV infections among adolescents in West and Central Africa (WCA) are girls, and despite a 49% decrease since 2010, the 90% target for 2025 remains unattainable, particularly for adolescent girls.

## Women's Health Gap Action Plan – Recommendations

- Prioritise research on underdiagnosed conditions affecting women
- Enhance data collection and reporting for accurate health insights
- Expand access to women-specific healthcare services
- Promote investment in women's health innovations and new funding models
- Adapt policies, medical training, and workplaces to support women's health
- Foster multi-sectoral collaboration for a holistic ecosystem approach
- Drive private equity and venture capital funding into FemTech start-ups
- Highlight women's health investment as a high-ROI initiative boosting workforce participation and quality of life

## Healthcare Innovations Transforming Women's Health

Movements for equality and empowerment have underscored the need to address disparities in women's health. In West Africa, advancements in digital health technologies can improve healthcare access, provide real-time symptom tracking, and empower women to make informed decisions.

### Improving Access to Healthcare

West Africa's healthcare strategy focuses on increasing government health expenditure, which enhances infrastructure, upgrades medical equipment, attracts skilled professionals, fosters research plus innovation, and enacts legislation to make healthcare more affordable as

well as accessible. For instance, PPC Healthcare in partnership with Neusoft Medical introduced the Neuviz 64 Multislice CT scanner in Nigeria, providing advanced imaging, faster scans, lower radiation doses, and cost-effective solutions.

### Providing Essential Health Information

Digital health solutions offer critical information on contraceptives, HIV self-testing, self-managed abortion, and medication. Digital Health Interventions (DHIs) expand access to care, improve outcomes in sexual as well as reproductive health, and ensure telemedicine counseling.

### Improving Maternal Health and Reducing Mortality Rates:

Digital health solutions transform maternal healthcare by improving access to services, facilitating communication, and empowering women.

Technologies like telemedicine, mobile health apps, and wireless fetal dopplers play a pivotal role in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates.

They enhance health management, provide personalised care, as well as enable real-time monitoring of critical conditions. These tools minimise the need for travel, which ensures consistent care and reduces risks associated with delayed interventions.

In Ghana, the Mobile Midwife initiative highlights the impact of these technologies. This programme delivers essential maternal health guidance and remote monitoring services, which significantly lowers mortality rates in remote areas. By equipping women with vital knowledge and enabling early detection of complications, it ensures timely medical interventions and safer pregnancies.

Its strategic objectives include capacity building, supporting women's entrepreneurship in digital health, and ensuring adequate investment for women entrepreneurs in the tech digital health space. This will help build a strong talent pipeline and ensure effective collaboration.

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From groundbreaking advancements in medical technology to strategies for improving healthcare access across the continent, WHX Lagos and WHX Labs Lagos aims to bridge the digital gender gap by establishing a multidisciplinary platform that brings together health stakeholders to promote women's engagement and leadership in digital health.





## Bridging the Gap Through Partnerships and Investments

Advancing women's health in West Africa requires robust partnerships and targeted investments. Several organisations lead efforts to transform healthcare systems and address systemic inequalities, contributing to improved outcomes for women across the region.

### Investments

#### The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) Project,

funded by the World Bank, addresses critical issues such as child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and early school dropouts across Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

The initiative supports community-based clubs, promotes secondary school retention for girls, as well as enhances access to reproductive and maternal healthcare. Policy constraints and insufficient funding further compound the issue. The lack of access affects women's health, educational attainment, and economic empowerment, perpetuating a cycle of poverty as well as inequality.

#### The Primary Healthcare Provision Strengthening (HOPE-PHC) Programme,

Backed by USD 570 million under the Health Sector Renewal Investment Initiative, focuses on improving reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health. It aims to lower maternal and under-five mortality rates and enhance healthcare resilience.

#### The Guinea Enhancing Health System Transformation (GUEST) Project,

Supported by USD 95 million from the World Bank, modernises health services in Guinea. It strengthens reproductive, maternal, and adolescent healthcare, upgrades health facilities, addresses climate change impacts, plus updates the civil status system.

## Moving Forward: Seizing Meaningful Change

Women's health is fundamental to societal well-being, shaping families, communities, and economies. Progress requires a holistic approach that prioritises equitable access to care, addresses disparities, and invests in impactful solutions.

By bridging knowledge gaps, improving healthcare delivery, and expanding access to diagnostics plus therapies, we can advance the health and well-being of women across West Africa.

A redefined perspective on women's health must include biological, social, and gender variables, embracing inclusiveness for all individuals.

Empowering women with access to quality care enables informed decision-making, resilience, plus opportunities for education along with economic participation. Healthier mothers build stronger households and foster thriving societies. Collaboration across sectors is essential to drive innovation, amplifying women's voices in research as well as development, in addition to ensuring accessible and ethical healthcare solutions. Policies that promote innovation, incentivise investment, and foster regulatory support can sustain these advancements.

Through events like **WHX Lagos** and **WHX Labs Lagos**, which aim to bridge gaps and contribute to these goals, West Africa is on the path to creating an inclusive healthcare system that values every woman. Strengthening partnerships, fostering dialogue, and focusing on sustainable initiatives can transform health outcomes, promote equity, and build a brighter future for women, families, together with communities alike.



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# Where healthcare and laboratory innovation drives progress in West Africa

For more than a decade, Medic West Africa has been the go-to event for healthcare professionals, manufacturers, and distributors across West Africa. Now, as WHX Lagos, we're taking it even further offering greater opportunities, wider reach, and stronger industry connections as part of WHX, the world's leading network of healthcare and laboratory events.

In 2025, WHX Lagos will be co-located with WHX Labs Lagos, creating a powerful, unified platform that brings together the healthcare and laboratory sectors under one roof. This integration opens new avenues for collaboration, encourages innovation, and ensures a richer experience for every attendee-whether you're looking to expand your business, explore new partnerships, or discover the latest in healthcare and lab technology.

As West Africa's most influential healthcare and laboratory event, WHX Lagos & WHX Labs Lagos are more than just exhibitions-they're where manufacturers, distributors, and medical professionals come together to build relationships, gain industry insights, and explore the innovations shaping the future of treatment and diagnostics in the region.

Join us from 2-4 June 2025 at Landmark Centre, Lagos, Nigeria, for an expanded and dynamic experience.

WHX Lagos: [www.worldhealthexpo.com](http://www.worldhealthexpo.com)

WHX Labs Lagos: [www.worldhealthexpo.com](http://www.worldhealthexpo.com)

By:

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