



Republic of Rwanda  
Ministry of Health



**USAID**  
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In Partnership with



## **FUNCTIONALITY AND PERFORMANCE OF TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS IN RWANDA'S HEALTH SECTOR**

**JUNE, 2024**

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## Background

Technical Working Groups (TWGs) play a vital role in the health sector by bringing together experts, stakeholders, and decision-makers to collaborate on key issues, policies, and strategies. They are essential for optimizing the impact of health initiatives and ensuring effective decision-making processes within the health sector. TWGs operate under various authorities globally; in Rwanda, they function under the Health Sector Working Group (HSWG), with chair coming from the Ministry of Health (MOH) and co-chair from a development partner (USAID).

In Rwanda, all TWGs are composed of staff of the Ministry of Health (MoH) along representatives from Development Partners, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working in the specific areas and expertise of the TWG. The main objective of TWGs is to support and advise the MOH in the implementing sub-sector strategies and policies and developing relevant guidelines and tools for use by implementing agencies [1]. TWGs in Rwanda should also play a critical role in supporting the Ministry of Health (MOH) in policy development, program implementation, and monitoring of health indicators. Understanding the dynamics of technical working groups (TWGs) in the Rwandan context is essential for strengthening health systems and achieving sustainable health outcomes. [2][3]

Despite the pivotal role TWGs play in Rwanda's healthcare system, several operational challenges undermine their effectiveness. Issues such as unclear objectives, ineffective leadership, poor communication and resource constraints not only impede their performance but also threaten the implementation of health policies and strategies. [4],[5] Addressing these challenges and leveraging opportunities for improvement is crucial to enhancing the impact of TWGs on health system strengthening and policy development leading to reforms or revamping of existing TWGs.

TWGs serve as platforms for knowledge sharing, evidence-based policy development, and strategic planning. [2] By convening diverse stakeholders, including government officials, healthcare professionals, researchers, and development partners, TWGs facilitate collaboration and coordination to address complex health challenges. This collective effort contributes to the implementation of national health policies, strategies, and programs, ultimately improving health outcomes and service delivery. [3]

Several studies have explored the role and effectiveness of TWGs in healthcare settings. [6], [7], [8] Research has highlighted the importance of clear objectives, well-defined structures, and effective leadership in ensuring the success of TWGs. [4], [9], [10] Additionally, studies have emphasized the need for active participation, trust among members, and evidence-based decision-making processes within TWGs. [9]

Rwanda has made significant strides in improving its healthcare system, with a strong focus on primary healthcare, community engagement, and innovative approaches to address health challenges. [11], [12]

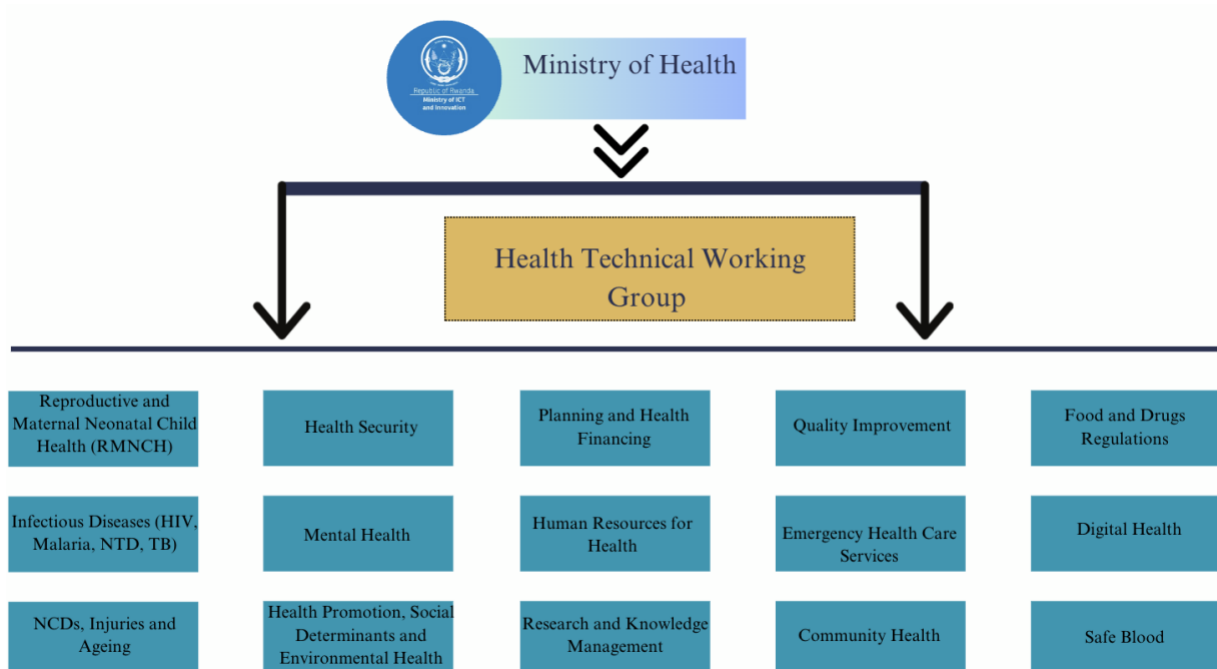
The primary objective of this study is to assess the functionality and performance of TWGs in Rwanda's health sector. By examining the structure, governance, collaboration, use of evidence, effectiveness, and achievements of TWGs, this research aims to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement within these groups. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for enhancing the impact of TWGs on health policy development and implementation in Rwanda.

### Current structure of Technical Working Groups

TWGs were created based on health pressing needs and have been formed overtime to respond and guide Ministry of Health policies and implementation strategies. .

Figure 1 illustrates the 15 TWGs and structure for a health initiative overseen by the Ministry of Health. It centers around a Health Technical Working Group, which encompasses various specialized sub-groups. These sub-groups focus on different health domains. This structured approach indicates a comprehensive strategy by the Ministry of Health to address various health challenges through specialized focus areas. Each sub-group is tasked with specific goals and initiatives, ensuring targeted and efficient management of health issues. The collaboration across these diverse areas underscores the importance of an integrated effort in improving overall health outcomes.

Figure 1: TWGs structure



## **Objectives of the Assessment**

In recognition of the importance of TWGs in driving policy implementation and achieving health objectives, a comprehensive assessment was conducted to evaluate their operations, efficiency, and alignment with national health policies. The primary objectives of this assessment were:

1. To provide an in-depth analysis of TWG operations, including their structure, governance, collaboration, and decision-making processes.
2. To assess the extent to which TWGs promote synergies and align with national health policies and strategic priorities.
3. To identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement within the TWGs to enhance their functionality and effectiveness.

This assessment aimed to gain a holistic understanding of TWG dynamics and uncover potential bottlenecks or challenges that may hinder their ability to contribute effectively to policy formulation and implementation.

## **Scope and Importance**

The scope of this assessment encompassed the 15 TWGs operating within the health sector, covering a wide range of focus areas such as reproductive and maternal health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, health security, mental health, health promotion, and environmental health, among others.

The assessment's findings hold significant importance as they provide valuable insights into the current state of TWGs, highlighting areas that require attention and improvement. By identifying strengths and weaknesses, this assessment paves the way for informed decision-making and targeted interventions to enhance TWG functionality, promote evidence-based policymaking, and ultimately contribute to the achievement of national health objectives.

Furthermore, the assessment serves as a baseline for ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts, enabling stakeholders to be accountable, to be able track their own progress and the progress of the health sector strategic policies and implementation as well as measuring the impact of implemented strategies aimed at strengthening health sector overall operations and performance over time.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Context**

The study was conducted within the framework of the TWG assessment report, aimed at evaluating the operations and effectiveness of TWGs in the health sector. The assessment sought to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in TWG functioning to enhance their contribution to evidence-based policy-making. Findings from this assessment will inform the ministry leadership and stakeholders to strengthen the existing TWGs but also to explore areas of

overlapping across TWGs or re designing new TGWs that respond to health sector needs and priorities that include emerging health threats such as pandemic diseases.

### **Study Design**

To respond to the objectives set above, a mixed-method approach was employed to gather comprehensive data on TWG operations. This approach combined quantitative surveys and qualitative consultations to provide a holistic understanding of TWG dynamics.

### **Study Setting**

The study was conducted in Kigali City among members of the 15 TWGs operating within the health sector. This location hosts all the TWGs assessed in this study, providing a unique urban context for the analysis of TWG operations.

### **Target Population**

The study targeted population that is actively engaged in the activities of 15 TWGs operating within the health sector TWG activities, including attending meetings, participating in decision-making processes, and contributing to policy formulation. Participants comprised a diverse group of stakeholders such as government officials, healthcare professionals, researchers, and representatives from partner organizations.

### **Sampling and Sample Size**

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select a total of 75 participants for the study. At least five members from each of the 15 TWGs were self-selected, to respond to the online tool designed by the researchers to understand challenges and opportunities including the efficiency of each of the TWG. This sampling approach ensured representation from various TWGs and captured a broad spectrum of perspectives on TWG operations. The sample size was determined based on the need to gather sufficient data for a robust analysis of TWG performance and effectiveness.

### **Data Collection Methods**

A structured questionnaire, comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions, was developed and uploaded to REDCap. A link to the online tool was then created and shared with members of the Technical Working Groups to facilitate efficient, voluntary and anonymous data collection method ensuring confidentiality of the members of TWG who consented to participate in the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

#### *i. Data Cleaning and Processing:*

This initial phase was critical in handling missing values and preparing the dataset for detailed analysis. The data collected were meticulously cleaned and processed to adhere to high-quality standards typical of online data, ensuring the dataset was primed for robust analysis. This careful



preparation was essential to pave the way for accurate and meaningful insights that followed in the analysis phase

ii. *Data Analysis:*

***Quantitative Analysis:***

Our approach to quantitative analysis began with conducting both descriptive statistics and more advanced analyses to explore correlations and agreements across Likert scales. Descriptive statistics provided a foundational summary of the data, using frequencies (n) and proportions (%) to outline the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the level of performance of the TWG, its functionality, and methods to assess the efficiency of the TWGs. Additionally, we implemented the Cronbach Alpha Test to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the scales used in the questionnaire, reinforcing the robustness of the data gathered. This thorough examination ensured that our quantitative analysis was grounded in reliability and precision, setting a strong foundation for informed decision-making.

***Qualitative Analysis:***

Simultaneously, our qualitative analysis employed a thematic approach to identify and understand the key themes that emerged during the data collection process. This analysis led to the extraction of key themes and the formulation of critical recommendations. Insights related to the operations of TWGs were also gathered, including potential areas for improvement in the TWG's functionality as perceived by the participating members. Through this in-depth exploration, we uncovered nuanced understandings of the TWG operations, enhancing our overall analysis.

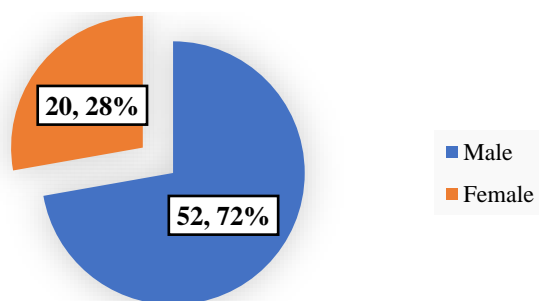
In processing the quantitative data, Python was used to perform the Cronbach Alpha test, while Excel facilitated the descriptive statistical analysis. We presented our findings using various visual tools such as charts, graphs, and diagrams where appropriate. These tools were instrumental in clearly presenting the findings, aiding in the interpretation, and facilitating effective communication of the results. Visualizations played a crucial role in translating complex data into an understandable format, enabling stakeholders to quickly grasp essential insights. For the qualitative data, we incorporated quotes to illustrate the views or opinions of participants throughout the analysis, enriching the narrative and providing a direct connection to the data sources. This methodical approach ensured that our analysis was comprehensive, detailed, and accessible, allowing stakeholders to make informed decisions based on a thorough understanding of the TWG's dynamics and outcomes. Our data analysis process, marked by thorough preparation and detailed examination, provided a robust basis for evaluating TWG performance and guided the strategic direction of the organization.

## Results

### Quantitative

The results section of this report presents a detailed analysis of the Technical Working Group (TWG) Assessment. These areas include Reproductive and Maternal Neonatal Child Health (RMNCH), Health Security, Planning and Health Financing, Quality Improvement, Food and Drugs Regulations, Infectious Diseases (HIV, Malaria, NTD, TB), Mental Health, Human Resources for Health, Emergency Health Care Services, Digital Health, NCDs, Injuries and Ageing, Health Promotion, Social Determinants and Environmental Health, Research and Knowledge Management, Community Health, and Safe Blood. The analysis is structured into the following sections: (1) Description of the sample, (2) governance, collaboration and decision-making process, (3) the performance (4) efficiency of the 15 TWGs within the health sector.

#### 1. Analysis of TWG operations: Demographics of the sample, affiliation, participation, Governance, Collaboration and Decision-Making



##### a. Demographic characteristics of the sample

##### i. Gender of participants in the sample

Figure 2: Gender of participants

Of all participants who initiated to respond using the online tool (99), only 72 (73,7%) completed the tool. Of those who completed the tool, the majority were male (n=52, 72%).

##### ii. Age of participants in the sample

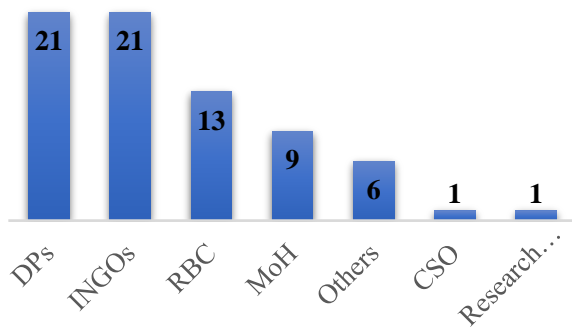
Age	Number of Participants	
	Count	Percentage
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100%</b>
24-33	11	15.3%
34-43	40	55.6%
44-53	13	18.1%
54-63	4	5.6%
64-73	4	5.6%

Table 1: Age distribution of participants

Most participants fell within the age range of 34-43, comprising 55.6% of the total completions, very few members of the TWGs were aged 54 years old or above (11.2%).

***b. Institutional Affiliation and Participation***

Institutional affiliation and participation provide a comprehensive overview of the organizations represented within the Technical Working Groups (TWGs). The findings shed light on the diverse range of institutions and stakeholders involved in the health sector, contributing to the collaborative efforts of the TWGs.



*Figure 3: Institutions affiliated with the TWGs in Rwanda.*

This table outlines the roles and contributions of key institutional affiliates in the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) in Rwanda. It highlights the involvement of the University of Rwanda, which provides research expertise and academic support; Development Partners, offering financial and technical assistance to enhance health systems; the Rwanda Biomedical Center, coordinating health programs and interventions; the Ministry of Health, overseeing health policies and services; International NGOs, bringing global perspectives and resources; and Research Institutions, contributing scientific knowledge and data for evidence-based decision-making. Together, these entities support the TWGs in improving health outcomes through collaborative efforts and specialized expertise. According to *Fig 2*. DPs and INGOs demonstrate high levels of institutional participation, indicating their significant contributions to TWG activities .

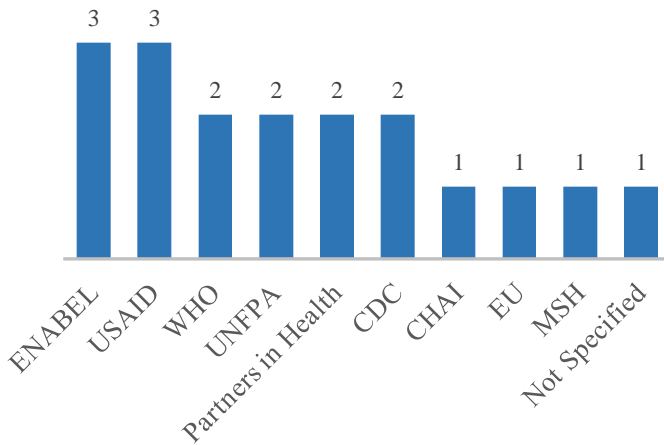


Figure 4: The breakdown of institutional participation by organization

This figure offers a quantitative analysis of the distribution of TWG members across various institutions. It emphasizes the differences in engagement and representation among each organization. Notably, ENABEL and USAID show higher participation rates in TWG assessments compared to other entities.

**c. Governance**

**i. TWG Membership**

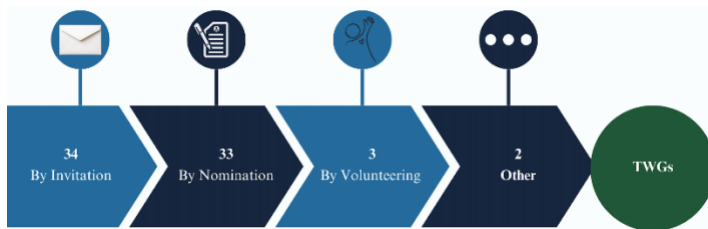


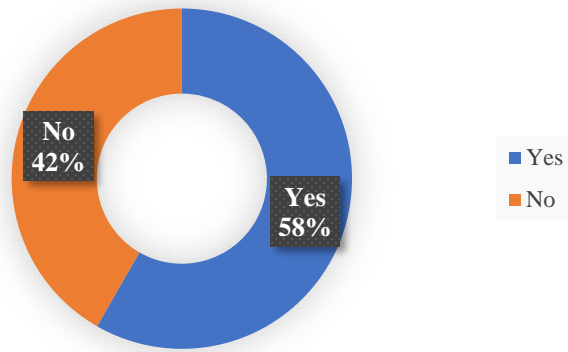
Figure 5: Diversity in Recruitment Methods for Technical Working Group Membership

The findings reveal that members joined the Technical Working Group (TWG) through various methods. A significant

portion, 34 participants, were invited to join based on their expertise, experience, or relevance to the group's focus areas. Another substantial group, 33 individuals, became members through nomination. This diversity in recruitment methods underscores the range of engagement approaches within the TWG.

**ii. Onboarding Practices in Technical Working Groups**

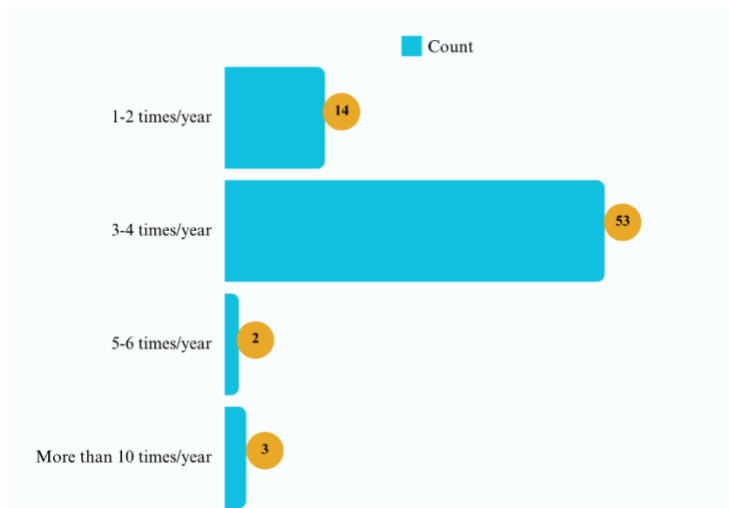
Terms of Reference (ToRs) serve as foundational documents that delineate the purpose, scope, and objectives of a Technical Working Group (TWG). They also specify the roles, responsibilities, and expected deliverables of its members.



*Figure 6: Distribution of Terms of Reference During TWG Onboarding*

This figure illustrates the dissemination of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) among members during the onboarding process for Technical Working Groups (TWGs). It shows that 42% of the members (30 out of 72 respondents) did not receive the ToRs, underscoring a significant oversight in the initial information sharing.

**i. Annual Meeting Frequency**

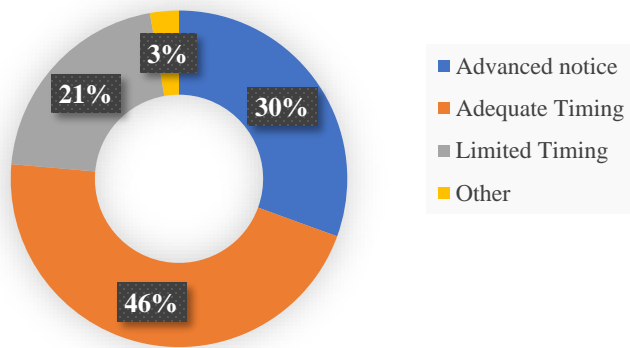


*Figure 7: Annual meeting frequency*

The findings indicate varied meeting frequencies among Technical Working Group (TWG) members. The majority (73.6%) meet 3-4 times per year, while 19.4% meet only 1-2 times annually. A smaller group, 2.8%, meets 5-6 times per year, and 4.2% have meetings more than 10 times a year.

**ii. Meeting Invitation Timelines for TWGs**

The timeliness of meeting invitations for Technical Working Groups (TWGs) provides insights into the effectiveness of the communication process and its impact on attendance. The findings highlight how well TWG members are notified about upcoming meetings.

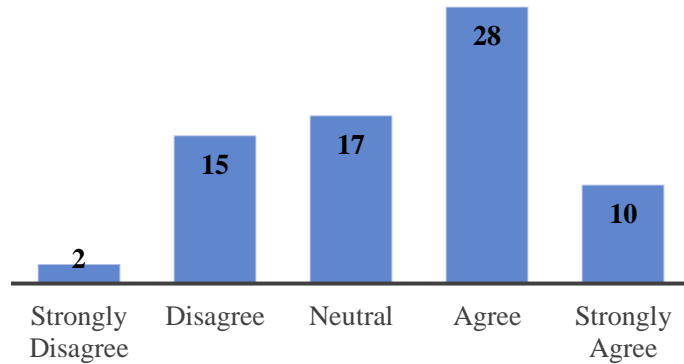


*Figure 8: Meeting invitation timelines*

Nearly half of the respondents, 33 participants (46%), reported receiving adequate advance notice for invitations. Additionally, 22 participants (30%) acknowledged receiving timely invitations. However, a notable 15 participants (21%) reported receiving limited advance notice for invitations, indicating a potential area for improvement in the notification process.

**iii. Attendance and Absenteeism Management among TWG Members**

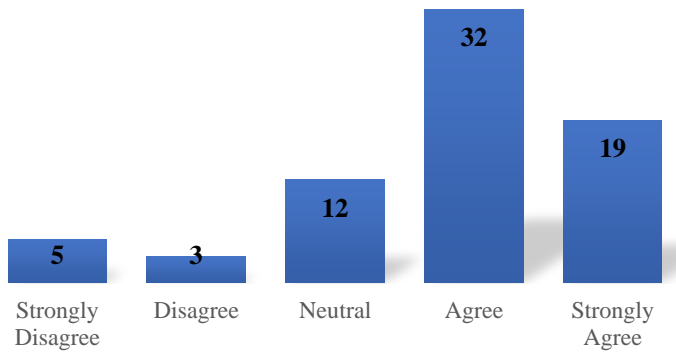
The effective management of attendance and absenteeism within TWGs is crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of their activities, particularly in advancing goals and objectives within the health sector. Here are key points highlighting the importance of addressing attendance dynamics.



*Figure 9: Consistency of TWG Members' attendance at scheduled Meetings*

The perception of TWG members regarding the consistency of attendance at scheduled meetings is varied. While 52.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that members regularly attend scheduled meetings, 23.6% were neutral, and another 23.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

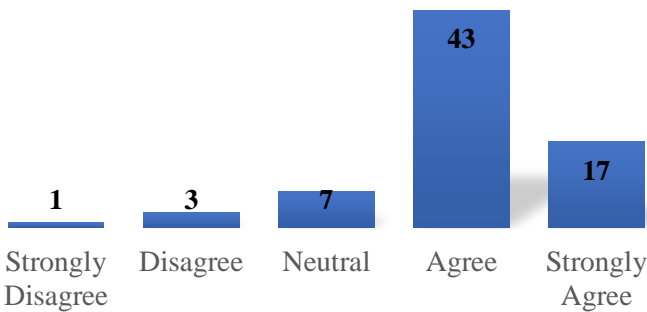
**iv. TWG Organization: Structure, Role Clarity, and Meeting Frequency**



*Figure 10: Clarity of TWG Structure and Hierarchy*

A significant majority of participants, constituting 70.8% of the respondents, express agreement or strong agreement with the statement that the structure and hierarchy within the TWGs are well-defined (Figure 14).

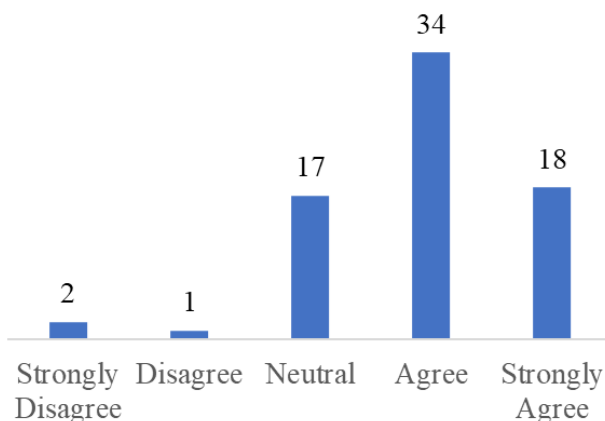
**v. Clarity of TWG objectives and goals**



*Figure 11: Clarity of TWGs objectives and goals*

The majority of respondents (83.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that TWG objectives and goals are clear, indicating a positive perception of goal clarity within the group. However, 5.6% expressed disagreement, suggesting a need for better communication to enhance understanding and alignment among members.

**vi. Evaluating conflict management and resolution processes in TWGs**

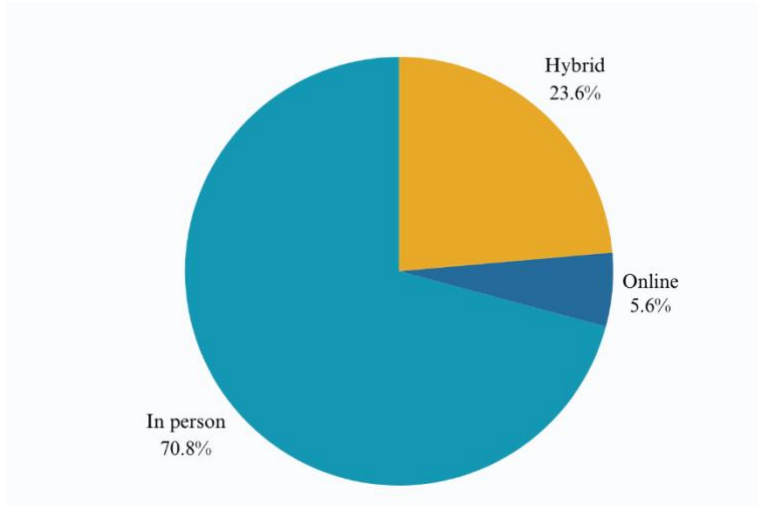


*Figure 12: Effectiveness of Conflict Management within the TWG*

The majority of TWG participants feel that conflicts are effectively managed and resolved, with 47.2% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing. However, 23.6% remain neutral, and a small minority of 4.2% (including 1.4% who disagreed and 2.8% who strongly disagreed) express dissatisfaction with conflict management within the group.

*d. Collaboration*

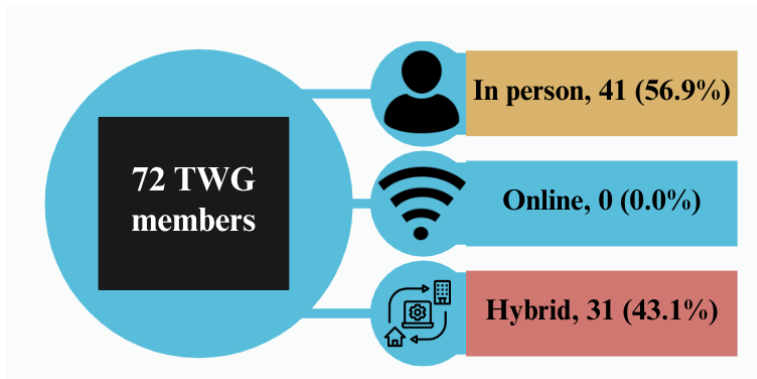
**i. Meeting Format usage among Technical Working Group Members**



*Figure 13: Current format usage*

The majority of Technical Working Group (TWG) participants, 70.8% (51 out of 72), currently use an in-person meeting format. A smaller segment, 5.6%, utilizes online meeting formats, while a significant 23.6% employ a hybrid approach, integrating both in-person and online interactions.

**ii. Meeting format preferences among technical working group members**



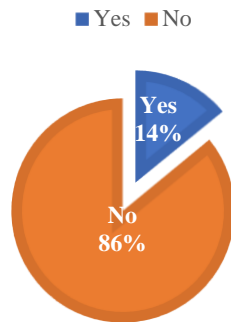
*Figure 14: Meeting format preferences*

None of the participants opted for an online meeting format. However, a significant 43.1% of participants preferred a hybrid meeting format, which combines both in-person and online interactions. Additionally, 56.9% of participants prefer in-person

meeting formats exclusively.



**i. Attendance accountability: Consequences and Measures**

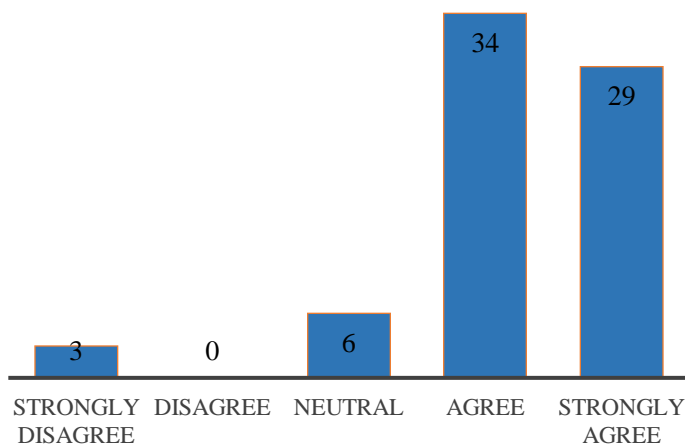


*Figure 15: Consequences and follow-up actions for consistently absent members*

According to the assessment results, 86% of respondents reported that consistently missing meetings results in consequences such as removal from mailing lists, missing important updates, falling behind on action items, and needing to provide

explanations for absences.

**ii. Team Dynamics and Collaboration in TWGs**



*Figure 16: Trust and mutual respect among TWG members*

The data indicates that the majority of TWG members, 87.5%, have a positive view of trust and mutual respect within the group, agreeing or strongly agreeing on the presence of these qualities. Conversely, a smaller segment of 9.7% disagrees or strongly disagrees.

**iii. Active Engagement and Knowledge Sharing Among TWG Members**

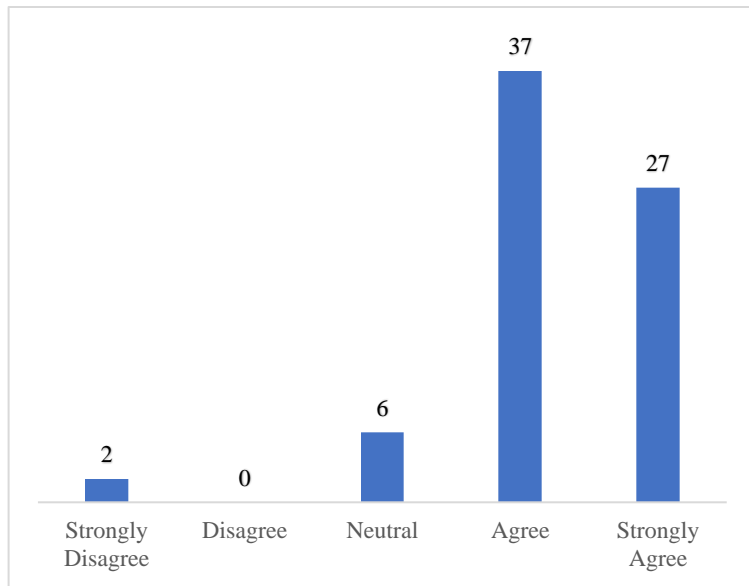


Figure 17: Active contribution of expertise and ideas by TWG members

The assessment results show a strongly positive trend in the active contribution of expertise and ideas among TWG members, with 88.9% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that members actively share their knowledge and perspectives. Only a small minority 2.8% strongly disagreed.

*e. Decision making*

**i. Clarity of TWG Member Roles and Responsibilities**

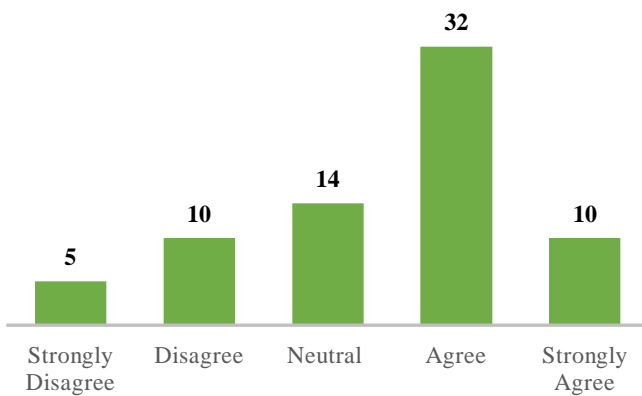
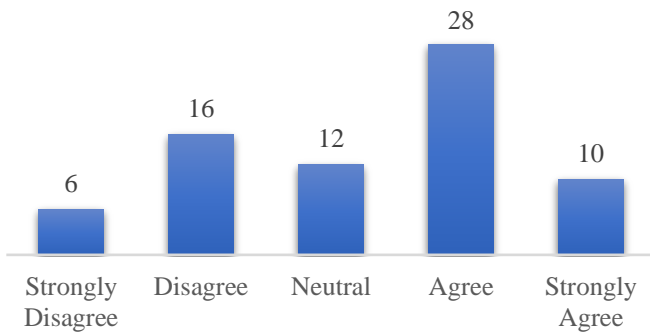


Figure 18: Clarity of TWG Member Roles and Responsibilities

The results from Figure 15 reveal that there is a division in opinions regarding the clarity of roles and responsibilities among TWG members. While a majority (58.3%) of respondents feel that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, a significant minority (20.8%) disagree.

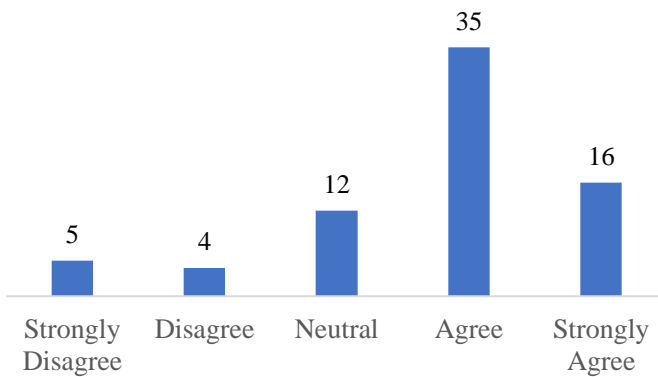
**ii. Regularity of TWG meetings**



*Figure 19: Regularity of TWG meetings*

The data shows that the regularity of TWG meetings is an area needing enhancement. Specifically, 30.5% of respondents either disagree or strongly disagree that meetings are held regularly,

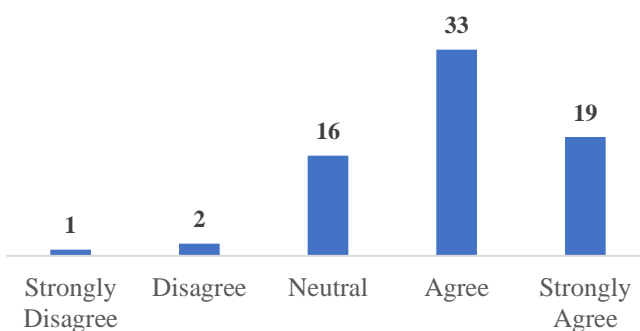
**iii. Meetings' Organization and Productivity**



*Figure 20: Organized and productive TWG meetings*

The data indicates that a significant majority, 70.8%, perceive TWG meetings as organized and productive, highlighting this as a strength of the organization. However, a small minority, 6.9%, disagree with this perspective.

**iv. Leadership Effectiveness**



*Figure 21: Effectiveness of TWG leadership*

Leadership within the TWG is viewed positively, with 72.2% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing on its effectiveness. Despite this, 22.2% remain neutral, and only 4.2% disagree.

## 2. Analysis of TWG Synergy and alignment with National Health Policies and Strategic Priorities

This section delves into the synergy within the TWG and its effectiveness in aligning with strategic health objectives. By examining the use of evidence in policy formulation, the diversity of data sources considered, and the processes for gathering and synthesizing evidence, we gain insights into the TWG's capability to make informed, evidence-based decisions.

### i. Use of Evidence to Inform Policy

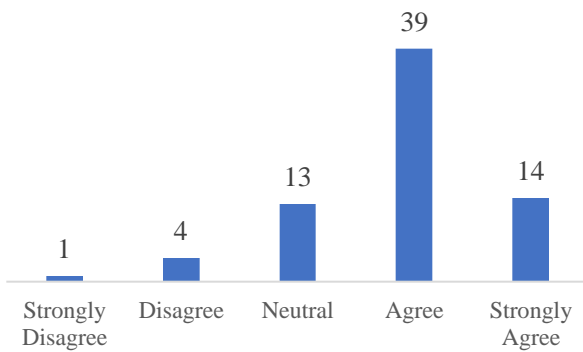


Figure 22: Utilization of evidence in TWG Policy recommendations

A strong majority (73%) agree that the TWG effectively uses evidence in its policy recommendations, though 19% are neutral, indicating some uncertainty about this process.

### ii. Perceptions of Progress in TWG Achievements

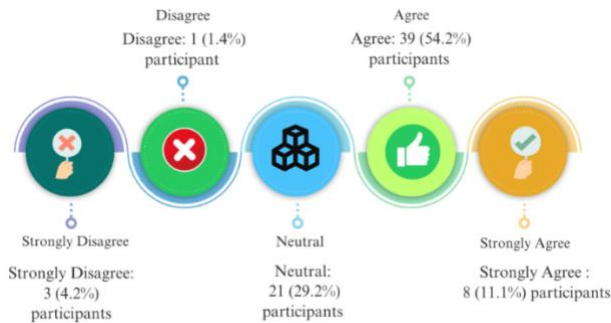


Figure 23: TWG's Progress Toward Goal

The results show mixed perceptions of the TWG's progress. While 65.3% of participants agree or strongly agree that substantial progress has been made, 29.2% are neutral, and 5.6% disagree or strongly disagree.

### iii. Assessment of Evidence-Based Decision-Making in TWG Policy Formulation

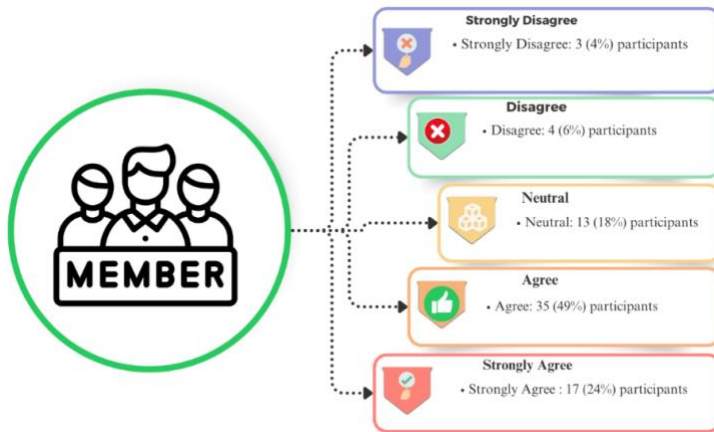


Figure 24: Utilization of research findings in TWG Decision-Making.

A strong majority (73%) agree or strongly agree that the TWG effectively utilizes evidence in its policy recommendations, indicating evidence-based decision-making. However, 18% of participants are neutral, and 10% disagree or strongly disagree with this assessment.

### iv. Perceptions of Evidence Gathering and Synthesis in TWG Operations

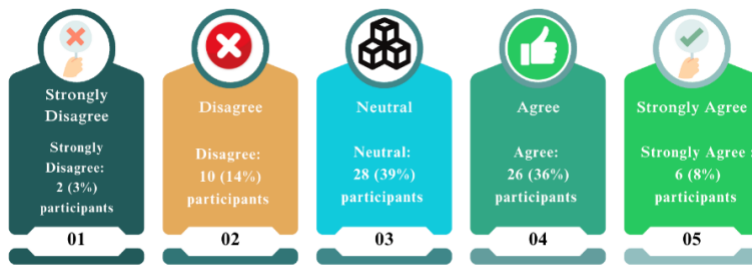


Figure 25: Evidence-gathering and synthesis processes

Participants have mixed views on the TWG's evidence gathering and synthesis processes. While 44% agree or strongly agree that these processes are well-established, 39% are neutral, and 17% disagree

or strongly disagree.

### v. Diversity of Evidence in TWG Policy Development

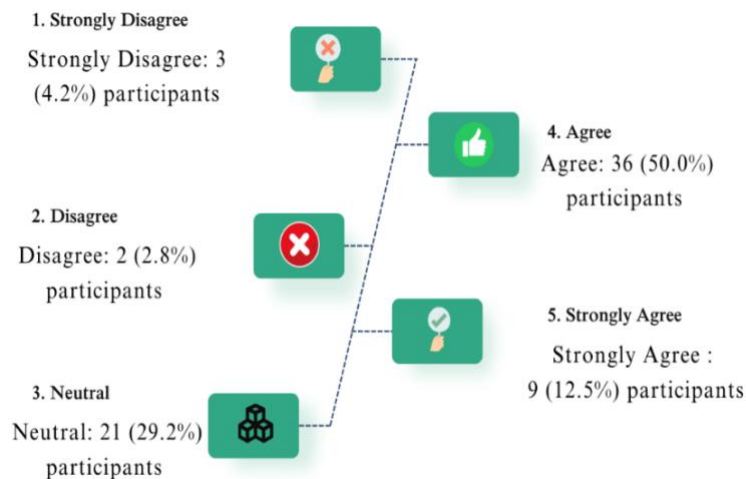
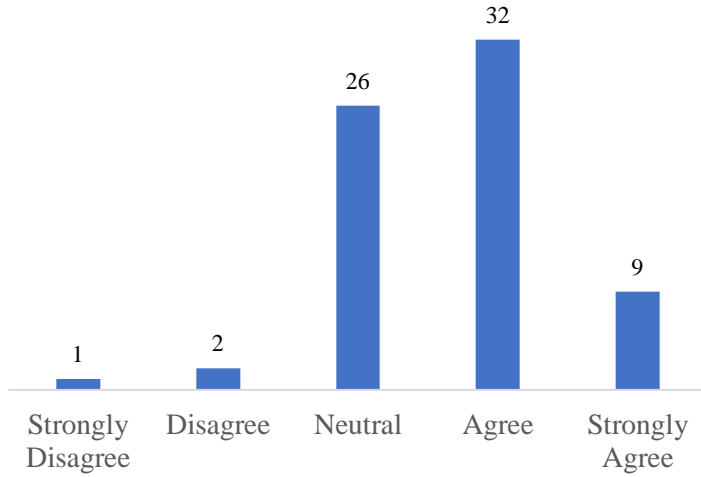


Figure 26: Range of Evidence Utilized in TWG Policy Formulation

A significant percentage of participants (62.5%) agree or strongly agree that the TWG considers a wide range of data and research sources in its policy recommendations. The relatively high number of neutral responses (29.2%).

**vi. Impact of TWG on Policy Decision-Making**

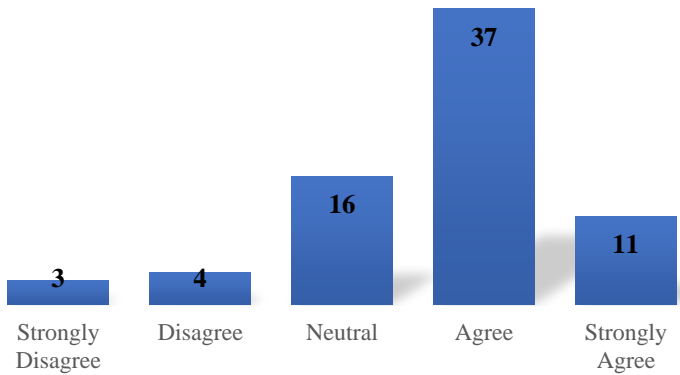


*Figure 27: Examining the effectiveness of TWG contributions in shaping policy decisions*

The TWG has significantly influenced policy decision-making, with 56.9% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing on its positive impact. Detailed feedback highlights the TWG’s role in shaping policies, strategies, guidelines, and reforms, demonstrating its effectiveness in improving the health system. However, 36.1% of participants

remained neutral, indicating some uncertainty about the TWG’s impact.

**vii. Effectiveness of Communication and Follow-Up in TWG Meetings**



*Figure 28: TWG Post-Meeting Communication and Follow-Up Effectiveness*

The data presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** indicates that the majority of participants (66.7%) agree or strongly agree that the TWG effectively communicates updates and follow-ups on decisions/actions

after meetings.

**viii. Effectiveness of TWG Communication with Stakeholders**

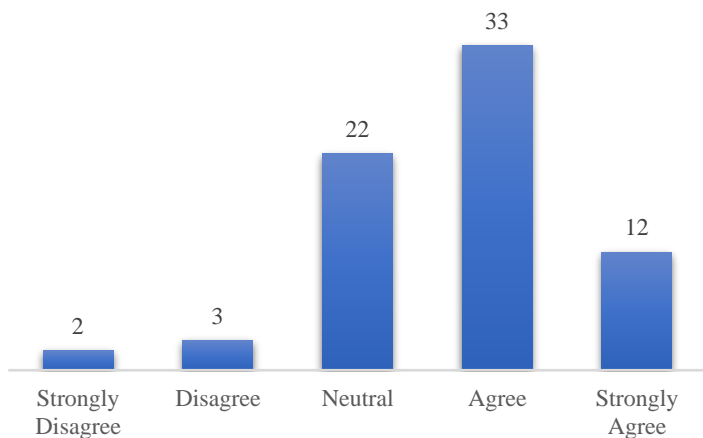


Figure 29: TWG Communication Strategies

The results from **Error! Reference source not found.** shows a high proportion of participants (62.5%) agree or strongly agree that the TWG effectively communicates its recommendations to stakeholders. The relatively high number of neutral responses for both questions (22.2% and 30.6%, respectively) reveals that some participants are

unsure about the effectiveness of the TWG's communication

## Qualitative

### 1. TWG operations: Participation, Governance, Collaboration and Decision-Making

#### A. Institutional Participation

DPs and INGOs demonstrate high levels of institutional participation, indicating their significant contributions to TWG activities.

*“.....The diverse institutional affiliations and active participation within the TWGs bring a collaborative ecosystem where stakeholders from various sectors work together to address complex health challenges, drive innovation, and improve health outcomes in Rwanda.....”*

DPs and INGOs play a supportive role in the TWGs, bringing external perspectives, specialized knowledge, and resources to enhance health sector initiatives and foster a collaborative environment for addressing complex health issues.

#### B. Governance

##### i. Sharing terms of reference (ToRs) while onboarding

Terms of Reference (ToRs) are typically used to define the purpose, scope, and objectives of a TWG, as well as outline the roles, responsibilities, and expected deliverables of its members. The assessment of technical working group (TWG) members revealed a potential gap in the onboarding process.

*“Sharing the Terms of Reference during the onboarding process is crucial to ensure that all members have a clear understanding of their roles, expectations and the overall goals of the TWG”.*

Without proper dissemination and understanding of the ToRs, TWG members may lack clarity on their responsibilities, the group's objectives, and the expected outcomes, hindering effective collaboration and decision-making processes.

## **ii. Meeting Invitation Timeliness for TWGs**

Meeting invitation timeliness for TWG meetings provides detailed responses regarding the timeliness of meeting invitations and its impact on attendance. The findings indicate the varying effectiveness of the communication process within the TWGs in terms of notifying members about upcoming meetings in a timely manner.

During the assessment, participants were asked whether there were instances where the timing of TWG meeting invitations impacted their ability to attend. This question aims to assess the practical implications of invitation timing on members' participation and engagement in TWG activities.

## **iii. Attendance and Absenteeism Management among TWG Members**

Respondents highlighted various challenges that impacted their ability to attend TWG meetings due to timing conflicts.

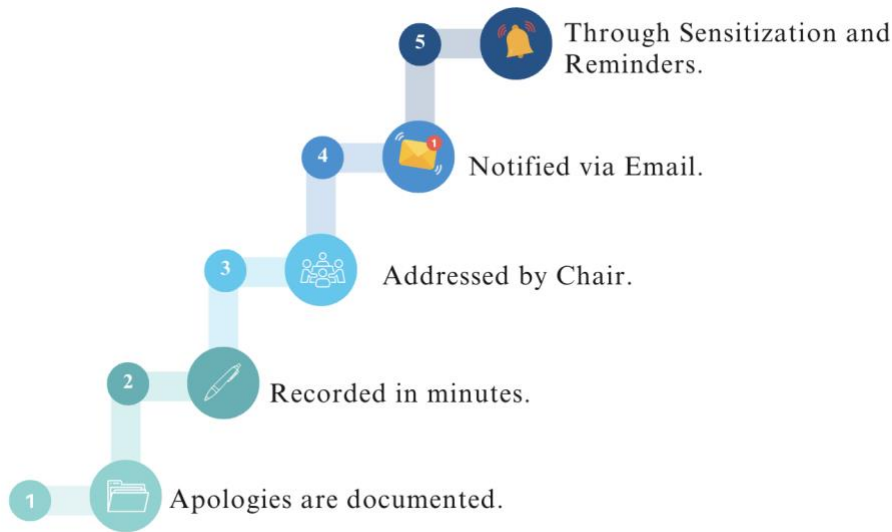
*".....Overlapping schedules with other professional or personal commitments make it extremely difficult to manage my time and balance multiple obligations. ...."*

Absences from TWG meetings could lead to detrimental consequences, These include gaps in contributions, missed opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-sharing and reduced involvement in critical decision-making processes within the group.

*".....Missing TWG meetings has serious consequences, including gaps in our contributions, missed collaboration opportunities, and diminished involvement in crucial decision-making processes....."*

The assessment also explored the strategies and mechanisms employed within the TWG to manage and address absenteeism among members. Effective management of absenteeism is crucial for maintaining productivity, ensuring representation, and maximizing the impact of TWG meetings and activities. The results indicate that the five primary methods for managing and addressing absenteeism among members are as follows:





By formally documenting apologies, the TWG maintains a clear and organized record of who is unable to attend meetings and why, fostering a transparent atmosphere that acknowledges each member's circumstances.

*“....Absenteeism is managed by documenting apologies from members who are unable to attend scheduled meetings. This practice helps track attendance, acknowledge reasons for absence, and maintain transparency within the group....”*

The diligent recording of absences in the meeting minutes provides a comprehensive account of member participation, enabling a structured approach to tracking engagement and ensuring that all discussions are contextualized by attendance.

*“Absences are recorded in meeting minutes to document the participation status of members and capture any relevant information or decisions discussed during the meeting. Recording absenteeism in minutes ensures accountability and facilitates follow-up actions”*.

The chair's active role in addressing absenteeism involves personalized communication with members who miss meetings, fostering a supportive environment that encourages consistent engagement and addresses potential barriers to attendance.

*“The chair of the TWG plays a key role in addressing absenteeism by communicating with absent members, understanding the reasons for non-attendance, and encouraging active participation in future meetings. Chair-led interventions can help mitigate absenteeism and promote engagement”*.

Sending email notifications to members about their absence from meetings acts as both a prompt for explanation and a nudge towards future participation, ensuring that all members remain connected to the group’s ongoing activities.

*“Absenteeism is managed by notifying members of their missed meetings via email. This communication method serves as a reminder, facilitates feedback on reasons for absence, and encourages members to stay informed and involved in TWG activities”.*

Employing strategies like sensitization and regular reminders about meeting schedules helps to cultivate a culture of commitment and punctuality, emphasizing the importance of each member’s presence for achieving the TWG’s objectives.

*“Managing absenteeism involves sensitizing members about the importance of regular attendance, reminding them of upcoming meetings, and emphasizing the value of their contributions to the group. Proactive communication and awareness-raising efforts can help reduce absenteeism and enhance participation”.*

According to the assessment results, 86% of respondents reported that consistently missing meetings leads to various consequences, such as being removed from mailing lists, missing important updates, falling behind on actions, and needing to provide explanations for absences.

The findings also shed light on the various approaches, measures, and strategies implemented within TWGs to effectively tackle the issue of consistent absenteeism among members:

The first potential corrective measure is the removal of frequently absent members from communication channels. This approach ensures that only actively engaged members receive critical updates and maintain the integrity of group communications.

*“One consequence for members who consistently miss meetings is the risk of being removed from mailing lists. This action serves as a measure to manage participation and communication within the TWG, ensuring that active members receive relevant updates, notifications, and information related to group activities”.*

To enhance accountability and transparency within the TWG, a mandatory justification for absences is required from members who regularly miss meetings. This policy helps the group identify and address any underlying issues that may be causing frequent absenteeism.

*“Another follow-up action involves requesting a letter of explanation for absence from members who consistently miss meetings. This requirement encourages absentees to provide reasons for their non-attendance, promotes transparency, and enables the TWG to understand and address any challenges or issues affecting member participation”.*

Regular absence from TWG meetings can cause members to lose pace with the group's current projects and strategic conversations. This disconnect can lead to postponed initiatives and reduced efficiency in achieving the group's goals, underscoring the importance of consistent participation.

*“Consistent absenteeism poses the risk of members falling behind on discussions, decisions, and action items within the TWG”.*

Frequent absences from TWG meetings can lead to a significant gap in understanding and participation for members, as they miss out on essential communications and joint discussions. This shortfall can greatly impair their capacity to actively engage with the group's efforts and perform their responsibilities effectively.

*“Members who consistently miss meetings may experience a loss of critical updates, insights, and discussions shared during TWG sessions”.*

### **C. Collaboration**

#### **i. Factors Contributing to Low Rates at TWG Meetings:**

Several factors contribute to low attendance rates at TWG meetings, including delayed invitations leading to scheduling conflicts, poorly planned logistics, and overlapping meeting times with other activities. Additionally, the absence of incentives, irrelevant meeting content, and weak attendance tracking further reduce member participation and accountability.

Meeting Invitations and Scheduling Conflicts:

*“Invitations for TWG meetings are often delayed, leading to scheduling conflicts. These delays can result in lower attendance as members face conflicts with other pre-scheduled activities. To address this, a more systematic approach to sending invitations is necessary, ensuring members receive them well in advance.”*

Meeting Planning and Coordination:

*“The coordination of meeting logistics and content sometimes lacks thorough planning, which discourages active participation. Effective planning involves clear communication of meeting objectives and meticulous logistical arrangements to encourage maximum attendance.”*

Compensation and Motivation:

*"Currently, there is no system of compensation or incentives for attending TWG meetings, which removes a potential motivating factor for participation. Introducing recognition or incentives for active involvement could enhance engagement levels among members."*

Relevance of Meeting Content:

*"The relevance of discussion topics is crucial for maintaining member interest and attendance. Meetings should focus on pertinent issues, avoiding irrelevant or unfocused topics that can lead to disengagement. Regular surveys to gather member input on topics of interest could help in keeping the meetings focused and relevant."*

Accountability in Attendance:

*"Weak monitoring and tracking of attendance fail to hold members accountable. Implementing a robust tracking system that records attendance and participation could help in identifying patterns of absenteeism and encouraging consistent presence at meetings."*

**ii. Factors Contributing to High Rates at TWG Meetings:**

Effective strategies that enhance attendance at TWG meetings include proactive communication with advance notices and reminders, prioritizing meetings over other commitments, and clear agendas that ensure focus. Additionally, strong leadership, consistent follow-up on action items, and fostering a collaborative atmosphere are crucial for encouraging active and productive participation.

Proactive Communication:

*"Proactive communication is absolutely key for ensuring high attendance at our meetings. By sending out early notifications and follow-up reminders, we make sure everyone can prioritize the meeting over other commitments. This approach keeps all members well-prepared and focused."*

Follow-up on Action Items:

*"The way we handle follow-ups on action items really shows the productivity and relevance of our meetings. When members see their input leading to real results, it boosts their motivation to keep participating actively."*

Prioritization of TWG Meetings:

*"For us, making sure that our meetings are prioritized is essential. We depend on clear and timely communication from our leaders to ensure these meetings are scheduled without conflicts, helping everyone make attendance a top priority."*

Clear and Focused Agenda:

*"I work closely with key members to craft a clear and focused agenda well before each meeting. This preparation is shared in advance to ensure*

*all participants can come prepared, which significantly enhances the effectiveness of our discussions."*

Leadership and Coordination:

*"Strong leadership is crucial for effectively coordinating our group. It's my responsibility to ensure our discussions are not only productive but also that they foster a collaborative atmosphere. This style of leadership helps build a strong community feeling and encourages active participation."*

### **iii. Process of Developing the Agenda of TWG Meetings:**

The process of setting the agenda for TWG meetings is collaborative and strategic, designed to align closely with overarching health priorities and ensure thorough member engagement.

*"The agenda is typically proposed via email by the chair, allowing the group to provide input. The agenda is then further elaborated and refined with the help of the Ministry of Health to ensure it aligns with key priorities and initiatives. TWG members decide on the finalized agenda, using the group's input to reach a consensus. Previous meeting decisions are also reviewed to maintain continuity and follow-through from one meeting to the next. The leadership then prepares the agenda and communicates it to the members in advance to allow time for any needed preparation"*

## **D. Decision making**

### **i. Establishment of TWG Objectives and Goals**

The objective-setting process within the TWG is characterized by input from multiple stakeholders, reflecting a collaborative approach. Participants provided various insights into who they believe is responsible for setting these objectives.

According to the data collected, a significant number of participants indicated that "*Group members*" are actively involved in defining the objectives. This participation suggests that members have a substantial influence on the TWG's direction, ensuring that the goals are pertinent and leverage the collective expertise within the group. As one participant noted, "Group members contribute their insights and expertise to shape the objectives, ensuring relevance and practicality."

Leadership also plays a crucial role, with many respondents highlighting that the "*Chairs and Co-Chairs*" are key figures in setting the objectives. These leaders guide the strategic planning of the group, synthesizing input from various sources to form coherent goals. One participant emphasized, "*The Chairs and Co-Chairs are instrumental in guiding our objectives, making sure they align with our mission and are achievable.*"

The involvement of the “*Ministry of Health and Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC)*” is another significant aspect of the objective-setting process. This indicates that national health priorities and policies heavily influence the TWG’s goals. One respondent mentioned, “*The Ministry of Health and RBC ensure our objectives are aligned with national health strategies, which helps us contribute to broader public health goals.*”

Additionally, the role of “*USAID*” in setting the objectives underscores the importance of international collaboration and support. USAID’s participation brings a global perspective, ensuring that the objectives are sustainable and adhere to international health standards.

However, there were also participants who indicated “*No idea*” when asked about who sets the TWG objectives. This response highlights a gap in communication or awareness among some members. As one participant admitted, “*I really have no idea who sets the objectives*”, which shows there’s a need for better communication about this process.

## **2. Evaluating TWG Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities for Improvement**

### **A. TWG Improvement Strategies**

#### **Member Participation and Engagement:**

*"Enhancing participation is key. We need regular updates and effective communication to keep all members prepared and engaged. Recognizing our contributions and involving us more in decision-making could significantly boost our involvement."*

#### **Coordination and Communication:**

*"Our coordination struggles because of misaligned schedules and unclear communication. If we could set fixed times for regular updates and establish clear communication protocols, it would make our teamwork much smoother."*

#### **Accountability and Role Clarity:**

*"Clear roles and responsibilities are crucial. We need structured accountability mechanisms to ensure everyone understands their tasks and the expectations placed upon them, which would enhance our overall effectiveness."*

#### **Meeting Management and Efficiency:**

*"Regarding our meetings, a member remarked, 'We must manage our time better during meetings. By preparing agendas in advance and sticking to them, we can make our discussions more productive and respect everyone's time.'"*

**Capacity Building and Resource Allocation:**

*"To truly enhance our capabilities, targeted training and adequate resource allocation are essential. Investing in our development can empower us, enabling more effective contributions to our TWG's objectives."*

**Strategic Recommendations:**

*"Addressing these operational and capacity challenges is crucial. By implementing targeted strategies, we can transform our TWG into a more effective and sustainable group that not only meets but exceeds its objectives."*

**B. Enhancing TWG Functionality and Performance**

The findings underscore the importance of strategic communication, data utilization, capacity building, and alignment with healthcare priorities in enhancing TWG functionality and performance. By implementing these findings, the TWG can strengthen its collaborative efforts, decision-making processes, and overall impact on healthcare outcomes, contributing to improved health system performance and patient well-being. The following are the key areas for improvement to enhance TWG overall functionality and performance:

**(i) Coordination and communication:**

*"Effective coordination and communication are pivotal for our TWG. We need to streamline our operations and improve our decision-making processes to enhance collaboration within our group."*

**(ii) Streamlining reporting and monitoring:**

*"It's crucial that we enhance our capabilities in data analysis and policy drafting. This improvement would optimize our reporting mechanisms and monitoring tools, making it easier to track the progress of policy implementation effectively."*

**(iii) Professional development and relevance:**

*"As one of our members pointed out, 'Creating robust reporting and dissemination tools within our TWG is essential. These tools would increase transparency, accountability, and facilitate knowledge sharing both among ourselves and with our external partners.'"*

**(iv) Capacity building and training:**

*"Establishing tools to monitor and track the progress and implementation of our health policies is vital. This will enable*

*continuous assessment and help us align better with our strategic objectives."*

(v) **TWG improvements:**

*"Our focus needs to be on enhancing governance, addressing healthcare challenges, and embracing technological advancements. These are the key areas that will drive significant positive changes in our healthcare sector."*

(vi) **Opportunities in healthcare management and technology adoption for TWGs:**

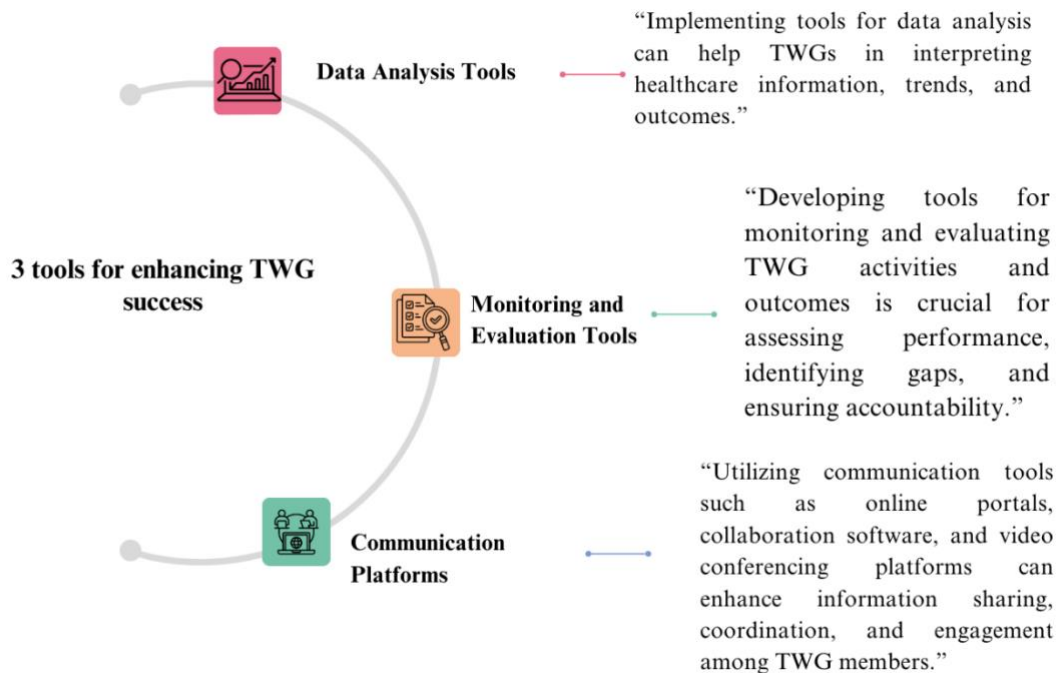
*"We must regularly update our terms of reference to reflect the current healthcare needs. This adaptability is crucial for our TWG to effectively respond to and address the emerging challenges and opportunities in our sector."*

**C. Tools and support for enhancing TWG success and performance**

The participants suggested the importance of utilizing various resources, mechanisms, and assistance to improve the effectiveness and outcomes of TWGs within the healthcare sector.

▪ Tools for enhancing TWG success:

*"To really boost our success and performance, it's critical that we use a variety of tools effectively. These tools are indispensable for data analysis, monitoring, evaluation, and ensuring clear communication within our groups."*

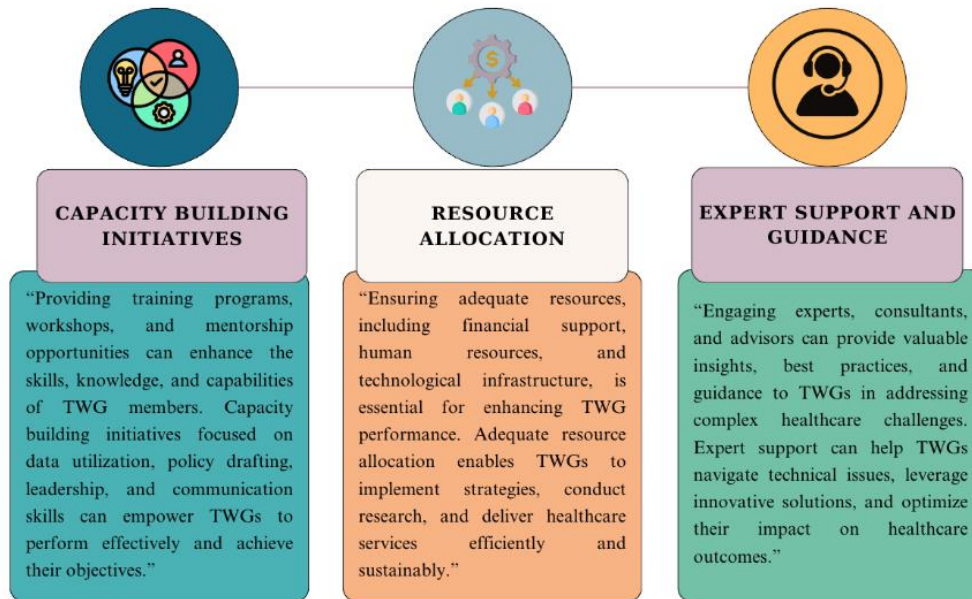


▪ Support for Enhancing TWG Performance:



*“Optimizing our performance and impact in the healthcare sector demands comprehensive support mechanisms. By providing these supports, we can significantly enhance our capabilities, resource availability, and strategic direction, which are essential for us to meet our objectives efficiently.”*

The following points outline key areas of support that can contribute to enhancing TWG performance:



#### **D. SWOT Analysis**

The SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats faced by TWGs. It highlights areas for improvement, such as resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and integration with the broader health system. Additionally, it identifies potential opportunities for leveraging technology, enhancing collaboration, and expanding the scope of TWGs to address emerging health priorities.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Diverse membership, including representatives from various organizations.</li> <li>➤ Regular meetings, with some TWGs meeting monthly or quarterly.</li> <li>➤ Some evidence-based decision making, utilizing research and data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Inconsistent meeting logistics, including irregular schedules and short notice for invitations.</li> <li>➤ Limited resources, such as funding, staff, and access to research and data.</li> <li>➤ Challenges in implementing recommendations due to lack of monitoring and follow-up mechanisms.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Insufficient engagement and ownership from key stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Leveraging technology for improved coordination, communication, and information sharing.</li> <li>➤ Enhancing collaboration through better coordination between MOH and RBC, engaging a broader range of stakeholders, and establishing mechanisms for regular feedback and updates.</li> <li>➤ Expanding the scope of TWGs to address emerging health priorities and cross-cutting issues.</li> <li>➤ Strengthening capacity building and professional development opportunities for TWG members.</li> <li>➤ Improving research and data analysis capability to significantly contribute to policy development and decision-making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Competing priorities and busy schedules of TWG members, leading to poor attendance and participation.</li> <li>➤ Lack of accountability mechanisms, including unclear roles and responsibilities, ToRs, inadequate communication with policymakers, and absence of monitoring and evaluation processes.</li> <li>➤ Challenges in evidence generation and utilization, such as limited access to data and research findings and insufficient skills among TWG members.</li> <li>➤ Organizational and structural barriers, including unclear governance structures, frequent turnover of members, and lack of integration with the broader health system.</li> </ul>

## Discussions

### Main Findings

The assessment of Technical Working Groups (TWGs) in Rwanda's health sector highlighted their significant role in shaping healthcare policies through diverse stakeholder engagement and evidence-informed decision-making. A prominent strength identified was the collaborative framework, enabling varied healthcare stakeholders to contribute effectively. However, substantial challenges were identified, including inconsistent meeting frequencies, lack of clear objectives, and suboptimal communication strategies, which hinder effective operation and impact of TWGs.

### Comparison with other Studies

Comparing these findings with the Malawi study, both contexts underscore the critical nature of TWG functionality in health system improvement. Both studies reveal that well-functioning TWGs are characterized by frequent meetings and diverse membership that contributes to robust decision-making. However, in Rwanda, unlike Malawi, there was a stronger emphasis on the need for clearer communication and role definition within TWGs. Malawi's study also highlighted a

severe impact of funding limitations, which was less emphasized in the Rwanda study but is equally important for ensuring TWG sustainability[13], [14], [15].

### **Implications for the Ministry of Health or Health Sector**

The findings suggest that the Rwandan Ministry of Health (MoH) should implement more structured communication strategies, clearer role definitions, and regular capacity-building initiatives. These steps would enhance TWG effectiveness in integrating research into policy-making, ultimately improving health service delivery and outcomes. The MoH is encouraged to foster an environment where TWGs can function with predictable schedules and well-defined objectives to maximize their contribution to the health sector[16].

### **Strengths of the Study**

The study's strength lies in its comprehensive approach, utilizing a mixed-methods design to capture a broad spectrum of insights into TWG operations. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of both quantitative aspects of TWG functionality and qualitative insights from TWG members, offering a well-rounded view of the dynamics within these groups.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Potential biases in self-reported measures could influence the authenticity of the data. Future studies could benefit from incorporating more objective metrics of performance.

## **Recommendations**

### **Changes Recommended by TWGs Members**

Based on the findings from the assessment, several key recommendations have been identified to enhance TWG functionality and effectiveness. These recommendations, derived from the findings of the TWG's assessment, are as follows:

1. Implement regular meetings as outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) to ensure consistent and structured discussions among TWG members.
2. Streamline agenda items to allow for more in-depth discussions, enabling the TWG to delve into critical issues and make well-informed decisions.
3. Revise the agenda to ensure meetings adhere to scheduled timing, promoting efficient time management and maintaining focus on priority topics.
4. Establish a feedback mechanism to review decisions made during TWG meetings, fostering accountability and enabling the group to assess the effectiveness of their actions.
5. Encourage consistent attendance by designated representatives from each organization, ensuring continuity and equal participation from all stakeholders.

6. Appoint a secretary to ensure timely dissemination of meeting minutes, facilitating prompt communication and keeping all members informed of key discussions and decisions.
7. Emphasize the importance of nominated members' commitment to attendance, highlighting the value of their consistent presence and active participation in TWG meetings.
8. Include relevant experts in discussions to enhance the quality of deliberations, leveraging their specialized knowledge and insights to inform decision-making processes.
9. Facilitate coordination between the MOH Planning team and other relevant government entities for effective monitoring of healthcare system recommendations, promoting a holistic approach to implementation and oversight.

## Overall Recommendations

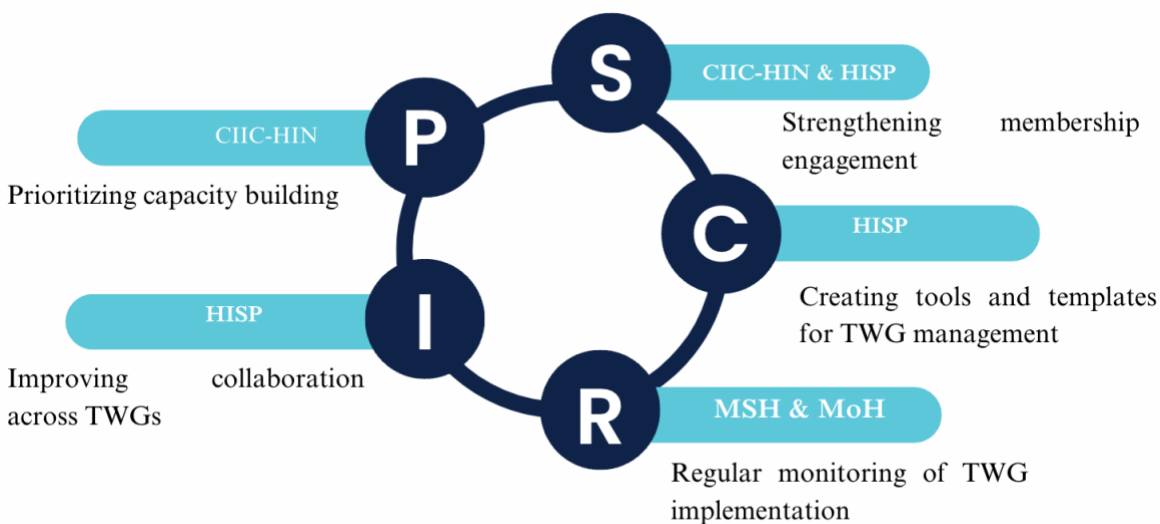
The following are the key suggestions and actions that should be implemented to enhance the effectiveness and impact of TWGs within the healthcare sector. All recommended points serve as a comprehensive guide for stakeholders and partners involved in TWG activities, outlining strategic steps to improve TWG functionality and performance.

1. **Prioritizing capacity building:** It is strongly recommended that the Technical Working Group (TWG) prioritize capacity building initiatives to enhance the skills and capabilities of its members. This recommendation emphasizes the critical importance of investing in programs and activities that enable TWG members to effectively utilize data, efficiently manage resources, and develop expertise in data analysis and evidence synthesis.
2. **Improving collaboration across TWGs:** To maximize synergies and enhance the impact of collective efforts, it is highly recommended that the organization fosters a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing among Technical Working Group (TWG) members.
3. **Strengthening membership engagement:** To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Technical Working Groups (TWGs), it is strongly recommended to prioritize the strengthening of membership engagement. Active involvement of TWG members in decision-making processes and project activities is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership, commitment, and accountability among stakeholders.
4. **Creating tools and templates for TWG management:** It is recommended to develop standardized tools and templates for TWG management processes. These tools can streamline coordination activities, enhance communication, and ensure consistency in documentation. By implementing tools for project planning, progress tracking, meeting minutes, and reporting, TWGs can significantly improve efficiency and clarity in their operations.
5. **Regular monitoring of TWG implementation:** Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework is essential for tracking the implementation of TWG activities, assessing progress towards goals, and identifying areas for improvement. By conducting regular reviews, performance assessments, and feedback loops, TWGs can optimize their performance, address challenges, and enhance their overall impact on healthcare outcomes.

## Institutional Roles in Enhancing TWG Implementation

The following table outlines five key recommendations as listed above for enhancing the implementation of Technical Working Group (TWG) activities. Each recommendation is paired with specific institutions responsible for ensuring their successful execution.

**Figure 30: Assigning institutions to the recommendations**



## Conclusion

The assessment of Technical Working Groups (TWGs) within the healthcare sector has revealed significant gaps in functionality, leadership, governance, and data-driven policy insights. It is evident that timely evaluations are crucial to understanding TWG operations, efficiency, synergies, and areas for improvement. Such evaluations are vital not only to pinpoint dormant TWGs but also to ensure their effectiveness and to monitor their progress toward achieving healthcare goals..

Throughout the assessment, key recommendations have been highlighted to enhance TWG performance. These include fostering collaboration, improving communication, streamlining reporting and monitoring processes, and emphasizing the importance of capacity building and training initiatives. The implementation of these recommendations is crucial for strengthening functionality and catalyze positive change in healthcare initiatives.

We call upon stakeholders, partners, and TWG members in implementing the recommended strategies. A concerted effort is necessary to enhance TWG collaboration and improve healthcare outcomes underscoring a culture of continuous improvement, TWGs must strive for excellence by continuously refining their strategies and operations to align evolving healthcare needs.

There is a commitment to supporting TWGs in addressing healthcare challenges, driving innovation, and improving patient outcomes. Encouraging a collaborative approach among TWG members, stakeholders, and partners is essential to working towards common goals and achieving sustainable impact in the healthcare sector. Looking ahead, TWGs have the potential to play a pivotal role in shaping healthcare policies, driving advancements, and addressing emerging challenges through collective action and collaboration.

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