



When Coordination Meets Reality

Lessons from a TWG Functionality Assessment in Kaduna State

Each year, Kaduna State develops a Health Sector Annual Operational Plan (AOP) outlining activities needed to improve service delivery across its primary health care system. But plans alone do not deliver services. Between planning and implementation sits a quieter but critical part of the system: coordination.

Technical Working Groups (TWGs) are designed to ensure that the activities outlined in the AOP move forward. Yet during implementation reviews, an important question emerged: **Are these coordination platforms functioning in ways that truly support service delivery?**

This question prompted a closer examination.

Understanding the Role of TWGs

In health systems, coordination rarely happens in large conferences or high-level announcements. It happens in smaller rooms where programme managers, government officials, and development partners gather to review progress, troubleshoot challenges, and align priorities.

These platforms, known as Technical Working Groups (TWGs) bring together technical expertise, operational experience, and programme oversight to translate policies and plans into coordinated action.

In Kaduna State, TWGs play a central role in supporting implementation of the Health Sector Annual Operational Plan (AOP) under the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp). Their effectiveness therefore influences whether planned activities ultimately translate into services delivered at the facility level.

The Motivation for the Assessment

The rhythm of TWG meetings is familiar: agendas circulated, previous minutes reviewed, updates presented, action points recorded, and the next meeting date agreed. On paper, this appears orderly. Yet participants often leave with the same question: Did this meeting actually move anything forward?

This question arose repeatedly during planning and implementation discussions, revealing a disconnect between the existence of TWGs and actual programme progress.

To better understand how these platforms function in practice, the Health Systems Strengthening team at the Health Strategy and Delivery Foundation (HSDF) conducted a functionality assessment between October and November 2024.

How the Assessment Was Conducted

The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach combining interviews, meeting observation, and document review. The HSDF team engaged 10 TWG leaders (2 Chairpersons and 8 Secretaries), observed three TWG meetings, and reviewed key governance documents including Terms of Reference, meeting minutes, and AOP implementation materials. The framework drew on global governance literature and was refined in collaboration with the Department of Planning, Research and Statistics. Analysis focused on five dimensions: clarity of roles, decision-making processes, accountability, resourcing, and learning and adaptation.

Why TWGs Matter for Service Delivery

TWGs are where decisions about programme implementation are expected to happen.

When action points remain unresolved, the effects extend beyond the meeting room.

A delayed decision on vaccine distribution may mean a PHC facility runs out of stock. A pending discussion on workforce deployment could mean women in an LGA will continue delivering without skilled support. An AOP memo awaiting approval may delay essential commodities for facilities, slowing maternal health, immunization, and disease control activities.

In this way, TWG functionality directly affects whether planned health interventions reach communities.

Coordination mechanisms therefore matter not only for governance but for service delivery outcomes across Kaduna State's health system.

The Strengths: What Is Working

The assessment revealed that Kaduna's TWGs already have several strong institutional foundations.

Clear Terms of Reference exist, leadership roles are well defined, and meetings occur regularly under the SWAp coordination structure. TWGs are formally integrated into the Annual Operational Planning process. Escalation pathways exist for resolving issues that cannot be settled at the working-group level.

These foundations reflect years of institutional investment and provide a solid platform for coordination and collective decision-making.

The Gaps: Where Challenges Emerge

Despite these strengths, several operational dynamics can limit how effectively TWGs translate discussions into implementation.

Decision making/Authority gaps arise when large membership structures, sometimes exceeding 40 participants make scheduling and quorum difficult. When senior officials send representatives without decision-making authority, important discussions may occur without binding decisions, limiting the ability of TWGs to approve adjustments or resolve implementation bottlenecks.

Role clarity gaps stem from the absence of structured orientation for TWG members, which can affect participation and engagement.

Accountability gaps persist because action points are often tracked informally through phone calls or messaging platforms rather than standardized monitoring tools.

Performance measurement gaps also exist. Current indicators focus largely on meeting frequency and attendance rather than implementation outcomes such as AOP activity completion or action-point closure.

Finally, implementation constraints including delays in cash backing for approved AOP activities can affect programme delivery even when coordination processes function well.



Opportunities for Improvement

The findings suggest that improving TWG functionality does not require major structural reforms. Rather, several targeted adjustments could strengthen the link between coordination and implementation.

Membership could be streamlined by distinguishing core statutory members from non-statutory participants. Structured orientation programmes could improve clarity of roles and expectations. Accountability could be strengthened through simple digital tracking tools to monitor action points between meetings.

There is also an opportunity to shift toward implementation-focused performance

metrics, including action-point closure rates and AOP activity completion.

Finally, TWGs could play a stronger role in learning and adaptive management, commissioning targeted assessments and engaging research partners to support evidence-informed decision-making.

Conclusion

Kaduna State's TWGs were already operating at a relatively advanced level prior to the SWAp transition. The current coordination structure therefore presents an opportunity not to rebuild these mechanisms, but to optimize them.

TWGs sit at a critical point in the health system where policies meet implementation. When these platforms function well, the activities outlined in the Annual Operational Plan translate into improved services at primary health care facilities across the state.

Because when coordination works effectively, its impact is visible not only in meeting minutes but in healthier communities across Kaduna State.