

The 69th ECSA-HC Conference of Health Ministers

Reported by Francis Omaswa



The East Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA) 69th Health Ministers' Conference was held at Taj Pamodzi Hotel, Lusaka, Zambia from

19–21 February 2020. The Conference was attended by Honourable Ministers, Heads of Delegation and senior officials from ECSA Health Community Member States, partner organisations, research institutions, civil society organisations and other key stakeholders. It was organised under the theme: Innovation and Accountability in Health Towards Achieving Universal Health Coverage.

The Conference was opened by the Vice President of the Republic of Zambia, Inonge Mutukwa Wina, who was particularly pleased to note that the theme of the Conference resonated well with the Africa Union Agenda 2063.

She noted that the ongoing Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the recent coronavirus outbreak (Covid-19) posed serious threats that called for enhanced collaborative cross-border surveillance efforts and partner coordination. She urged the conference to come up with innovative solutions to the regional challenges.

The message was amplified by Dr Githinji Gitahi, MBS, in his keynote address, and by Prof Francis Omaswa in his discussion of Dr Gitahi's address, with called for greater investment in health and more efficient utilisation of available resources, backed by prioritisation of those interventions, such as health promotion, disease prevention and keeping healthy people healthy, that offered the greatest returns on investment.

Professor Omaswa appealed to ECSA-HC Member states to support the inclusion of the currently missing SDG Indicator on People participation in UHC during the review of SDG indicators by United Nations that will take place in 2020.

Subsequent deliberations at the Conference proceeded under the following sub themes:

Francis Omaswa, CEO, African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (Kampala); Founding Executive Director of the Global Health Workforce Alliance; and publisher of Africa Health.

- Equity and access to eye health in the ECSA region
- Opportunities for achieving water, sanitation and hygiene global health targets
- Efforts to improve adolescent and young people's health
- Innovative approaches towards achieving food safety and improving quality of life
- Prioritising challenges of substance use and mental health challenges in ECSA region
- Tackling emerging and re-emerging health threats: a regional one-health approach to managing recurrent outbreaks

At the end of the conference, the ministers considered and passed resolutions on the above topics. There were two resolutions thanking the government of Zambia and Development Partners.

In the wake of the Covid-19 and the persisting Ebola outbreak in the DRC, the Health Ministers' Committee (HMC) also urged member states to:

1. Accelerate and sustain the implementation of past resolutions on emerging and re-emerging health threats
2. Establish and/or strengthen and operationalise National Public Health Institutes in-line with the Africa CDC Strategy to coordinate preparedness and surveillance systems in a multi-sectoral approach, including Emergency Operating Centres
3. Strengthen cross-border collaborations between Member States in emergency preparedness and response to epidemics and other events of public health concern
4. Develop and/or implement National action plans for health security including multi-hazard preparedness and response plans to address gaps identified in the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) assessments
5. Strengthen surveillance systems for prevention, early detection and appropriate response to threats of disease outbreaks, including Covid-19
6. Establish and/or strengthen events based surveillance to enhance early detection of disease outbreaks

The HMC directed the ECSA-HC Secretariat to:

1. Review and document the progress made in the implementation of past resolutions on emerging and re-emerging health threats and report to the 71st HMC
2. Support the Member States to implement this Resolution.