

# A post-pandemic world with a decolonised mindset

Carol Natukunda and Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde report on the AFREhealth-CUGH Working Group Satellite meeting at CUGH2022

The Consortium of Universities of Global Health (CUGH) held its annual conference between 28 March and 1 April 2022. It was an entirely virtual conference. The theme of the conference was “Healthy People, Healthy Planet, Social Justice”. The conference format included satellite, plenary, oral presentations, poster presentations and networking sessions. The objective of the conference was to expand participants knowledge, give them an opportunity to share their work and identify new collaborators to improve the health of people and that of our planet.

The African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) and the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) Working Group (ACWG) held a satellite meeting on 24 March. This was one of the 29 satellite sessions held ahead of the 2022 CUGH conference. The AFREhealth-CUGH working Group meets each year at CUGH and AFREhealth annual meetings. The meeting was moderated by Quentin Eichbaum a professor of Pathology, Microbiology and Immunology and professor of Medical Education and Administration at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, Tennessee, USA who co-chairs the ACWG with Abigail Kazembe, the president of AFREhealth and Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde, the vice president of AFREhealth.

Kazembe started off the meeting by giving the history of the ACWG which started in 2017 and has developed over the years to form three subcommittees namely the Education, Student Exchange and Research Committees.

Dr Jimmy Volmink, a professor in the Department of Global Health and a former Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, was the keynote speaker. He addressed the topic “Reflections on global health in a post-pandemic world with a decolonised mindset.”

In his address, he highlighted the enormous impact brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic since the outbreak over two years ago. These included, disrupting health services, stretching health systems, limited access to vaccines, stress and mental health issues, loss of jobs and livelihoods and disruption of education. He noted that the need to work remotely and the need to have long distance education during the lockdowns also exposed the digital inequalities in many countries. In

the health workforce it highlighted the fact that there was a chronic shortage of specialists in critical care for Intensive Care Units (ICUs). “Many health systems were not prepared,” observed Volmink, adding, “COVID-19 revealed the fault lines in health systems around the world. He noted that the issue was not yet over and that this will not be the last pandemic.”

He used this background to explain why and how global health as an area of study and practice could achieve equity and address the plight of the disadvantaged without leaving no one behind. “Health and health care are fundamental human rights. Neglecting them not only leads to suffering but erodes trust,” he stated. He called for holding governments responsible for taking people out of vulnerable situations. To do this, he added, there must be partnerships with the civil society organisations (CSOs), the private sector and the communities themselves. He noted that depending on the Global North is counterproductive since it erodes government responsibility to provide basic health commodities such as access to vaccines and bed nets.

The keynote address was followed by an interactive session where attendees made contributions on the COVID-19 response and related global health challenges. Following this session, there were breakout groups for the three subcommittees to discuss their plans going forward. The group later reconvened to share thoughts and ideas, and decide on the way forward for the coming year. It was agreed that the three subcommittees would continue to meet quarterly while the larger ACWG will meet biannually at the annual conferences.

Beyond this particular satellite session, the CUGH 2022 Conference assembled over 2,000 scientists, students and implementers from academia, NGOs, government and the private sector. A wide range of medical and non-medical disciplines were represented throughout the virtual conference. Attendees were inspired and challenged to learn new skills, network, and find ways in which to improve the health of people and the planet.

There were seven subthemes, namely: social determinants of Health, Covid-19; emerging infectious diseases, & other communicable diseases; planetary health, one health, environmental health, climate change and pollution; strengthening health systems, public health, primary and surgical care; bridging research to policy, reforming academia; governance and diplomacy; and non-communicable diseases.

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Carol Natukunda is the communication Specialist at the African Center for Global Health and Social Transformation. Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde is the Director Health Workforce Education and Development at the African Center for Global Health and Social Transformation.