

# Health Challenges in Africa

## Africa's looming challenges and successes

This issue highlights two important looming challenges for the African region, one on kidney diseases and another on climate change. Both these issues need urgent attention. They demonstrate the fact that Africa is facing multiple challenges from different fronts which may affect its ability to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. While Africa is still contending with the infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and TB, it is also increasingly being affected by Non-Communicable Diseases and the effects of Climate change. However, the issue also highlights some successes like the elimination of Onchocerciasis in Nigeria and the role of communities in combatting COVID 19.

The opinion focuses on an urgent issue that needs to be addressed in Africa, which is the need to coordinate African Health leadership. Francis Omaswa makes a call for cohesion, inclusivity and synergy in moving the African health agenda forward as a global public health good.

Two successful global conferences are summarized in this issue, the 5th Global Human resources for Health Conference that took place in Geneva, Switzerland 3-5 April 2023 with the theme "Protecting, safeguarding, and investing in the health and care workforce". It coincided with the World Health Worker Week. Francis Omaswa describes its objectives and outcomes.

The second conference was the Consortium of Universities of Global Health (CUGH) conference, 16 -19 April in Washington DC, USA with the theme "Global Health at a Crossroads: Equity, Climate Change and Microbial Threats". It was a very well attended conference addressing a wide variety of contemporary global health, environmental and development challenges, delivered in an interactive environment. A superb array of speakers from across disciplines and around the world was in attendance. There were 230 speakers, 50 sessions, 8 plenaries, 560 abstracts, the Great Debate, keynotes, awards, networking events, the Pulitzer Film Festival, Communications Workshop, student focused sessions, a Satellite Day, and more. It was a great success.

The next two articles highlight the burden of kidney disease in Africa. Both articles are a follow up on the World Kidney Disease Day of 6th March 2023 intended to bring awareness to kidney disease. Viraj Rajadhyaksha informs us that chronic kidney disease is too often undetected and undertreated, without sufficient public health policies in place to address its rapid spread in Africa, it has become a silent killer. There is therefore a need for Africa to look into this.

The Human Resources for Health deficit is global, however most of the worst hit countries are in Africa. Therefore, this is a subject of great concern for the region. Abebe Bekele et al narrate the success and impact of the College of Surgeons of East Central and Southern Africa, (COSECSA) Surgical Training in East, Central and Southern Africa. COSECSA has graduated 758 surgeons across 21 countries in Africa with a retention rate of 88.8% in the region and mainly in areas where they are most needed.

This goes to show that training health workers in settings where they are likely to work increases their chances of being retained in underserved areas.

Another success story comes from Nigeria written by Prof. B. E. B. Nweke. He provides an overview of onchocerciasis control and elimination efforts in Nigeria from the 1950s to date; showing how the country is progressively on track of the elimination drive using mass drug administration with ivermectin. This brings a breath of fresh air considering that many tropical diseases are re-emerging in Africa.

Yogan Pillay et al noted that amongst the long list of challenges impacting the daily lives of people living in Africa, and elsewhere, four, in particular stand out: inequities, conflicts, pandemics and climate change, all of which have significant impacts on population health. The article shows how climate change will affect the health of the African population despite the fact that Africa has contributed the list to the causes of climate change. It also suggest ways of how this could be mitigated.

The next two articles are on technology in Africa; Roy Mubuuke et al describe how training of midwives on ultrasound in hard-to-reach areas could improve reproductive health. Ultrasound is now available in remote areas in form of portable machines, some as small as laptops and is increasingly being used as a diagnostic tool for the rural areas. This links in well with the next article, which shows that Africa is now seeing impressive levels of growth in terms of innovation and investment in medical technology.

Omaswa et al summarize their experience in implementing a Community Engagement Strategy for COVID-19 Response and Health in Uganda. The key results of the work done demonstrated that empowered and organized communities have the capacity to own and take charge of their own health. Sometimes projects fail because the communities are not involved in their planning and implementation. This is an example of a successful project that highlights the importance of community engagement.

The East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC) held its 13th Best Practices Forum and 71st Health Ministers Conference, February 2023, in Maseru, Lesotho. The outcomes of this meeting are summarized here.

There is our usual medicine digest and quiz, plenty of news and advertisements.

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**Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde**  
(kigulimalwadde@achest.org)