

# AFREhealth Symposium 2023

The African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) successfully hold its 6th Annual Symposium

The African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) held its 6th annual symposium, 1-3 August 2023 at the Joaquim Chissano, Centro Internacional de Conferencias, Maputo, Mozambique. The symposium was attended by over 250 participants. The main Convener was the Eduardo Mondlane University under the auspices of the Mozambique Institute for Health Education and Research.

AFREhealth is an interdisciplinary health professional grouping that seeks to work with Ministries of Health, training institutions and other stakeholders to improve the quality of health care in Africa through research, education and capacity building. It is a conglomerate of individuals, institutions, associations and networks from all the geographic and linguistic regions of Africa namely Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and Arabophone. Membership is open to African and external stakeholders committed to an Africa with strong, self-sustaining and robust health systems.

**The theme was:** Addressing service, research, and educational needs in the context of epidemiological transition and climate change

**The subthemes were:**

- Health professions education and future health workforce
- Building research capacity for addressing epidemiological transitions, pandemics, one health, and climate change
- Addressing service delivery issues in the face of epidemiological transition

- Strengthening Africa's service capacity, including diagnostic services

The symposium aimed to provide a platform for experts, researchers, policymakers, and educators to exchange ideas, share experiences, and discuss strategies related to health in the face of changing epidemiological patterns and the impacts of climate change specifically in Africa.

The symposium opened with a series of keynote addresses and plenary sessions that set the stage for discussions throughout the event. Experts in various fields shared their insights on the symposium's themes and subthemes.

There were pre-conference satellites, workshops and meetings. The workshops in particular focused on grant writing and management, responsible conduct of research and good practice in clinical research, manuscript writing and Basic research biostatistics.

There were six plenary sessions that focused on the different subthemes as illustrated below. These featured experts from diverse backgrounds, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue. These discussions addressed critical issues, such as healthcare financing, policy development, and the role of international partnerships in addressing health challenges in the context of epidemiological transition and climate change.

Health Professions Education and Future Health Workforce: The importance of adapting health professions education to equip future healthcare providers with the skills and knowledge needed to address emerging health challenges was highlighted. Strategies for interprofessional



*Symposium group photo*

Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde is the president of the African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth).

education and the incorporation of climate change and epidemiological transition into curricula were discussed.

**Building Research Capacity:** The role of research in understanding and mitigating the impacts of epidemiological transitions, pandemics, and climate change was emphasized. Collaborative efforts, resource mobilization, and mentorship programs to strengthen research capacity in Africa were proposed.

**Addressing Service Delivery Issues:** A critical discussion on the challenges of providing healthcare in the face of shifting disease burdens was held. Presentations focused on the need for innovative service delivery models, telemedicine, and community-based interventions to reach underserved populations.

**Strengthening Africa's Service Capacity:** The importance of diagnostic services in healthcare systems was underscored. Discussions revolved around enhancing diagnostic infrastructure, increasing access to essential diagnostics, and building the workforce needed to support diagnostic services.

The symposium featured parallel sessions and workshops that allowed participants to delve deeper into specific topics related to the subthemes. These sessions covered a wide range of subjects, including: **Innovations in Health Professions Education:** Participants explored innovative approaches to health professions education, such as competency-based training, simulation-based learning, and the use of technology for remote and rural education. **Research Methodologies and Tools:** Workshops focused on strengthening research skills and the use of data analytics and modeling in epidemiology, climate change research, and pandemic preparedness. **Community Engagement in Service Delivery:** Discussions highlighted successful community engagement models, highlighting the importance of community participation in healthcare decision-making and delivery. **Strengthening Diagnostic Services:** Sessions emphasized the need for investment in diagnostic laboratories, training of laboratory personnel, and the development of quality assurance systems.

**Key Takeaways**

**Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** The symposium emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration among healthcare professionals, researchers,

educators, policymakers, and communities. Solutions to complex health challenges require a holistic approach.

**Research and Data:** Robust research and data collection are essential for understanding and addressing epidemiological transitions, pandemics, one health, and climate change. Participants stressed the need for sustained investment in research capacity.

**Innovation in Education:** Health professions education must evolve to equip future healthcare workers with the knowledge and skills to adapt to changing health landscapes. Innovation in pedagogy and curricula is essential.

**Community-Centered Care:** Engaging communities in healthcare decision-making and service delivery is pivotal for success. Community-based interventions and partnerships can help bridge gaps in healthcare access.

**Strengthening Diagnostics:** Diagnostic services are the backbone of effective healthcare systems. Investments in diagnostic infrastructure, workforce training, and quality assurance are crucial for improving healthcare outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The Symposium provided a platform for fruitful discussions and knowledge sharing. It underscored the urgency of adapting healthcare systems, education, and research to meet the challenges posed by epidemiological transitions and climate change.

As we move forward, the insights and recommendations from this symposium will serve as a guide for policymakers, educators, and healthcare professionals in their efforts to build a resilient and equitable healthcare system that can withstand the changing tides of epidemiology and climate.

AFREhealth expresses its gratitude to all participants, organizers, and partners who contributed to the success of this symposium and looks forward to continued collaboration and progress in addressing these pressing global health issues.

AFREhealth would like to thank all the sponsors of this symposium including Intealth-ECFMG/FAIMER, Galileo Global Education, Adapt, the one health network, Africa CDC, PEPFAR, HRSA and UCSF.

# Opportunities and Challenges for the Radical Reorientation of Primary Health Care

My take home from the UN General Assembly (UNGA 78); 21 – 26 September, 2023



World leaders gathered to engage in the annual high-level General Debate of The UN General Assembly (UNGA 78) 21 – 26 September, 2023 in New York. The theme was, “Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all.” Heads of State and Government adopted a political declaration to guide action moving forward.

I participated as an invited speaker in Panel 1 during UNGA 78 which convened three High-Level Meetings on health. It was a historic opportunity for world leaders to place health back on the high-level political agenda as they recommitted to ending tuberculosis (TB), delivering Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response.

It was noted with concern during UNGA 78 that at the current mid-point towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world is off track to achieve the health targets by 2030. Millions of people cannot access life-saving and health-enhancing interventions. Out-of-pocket spending on health catastrophically affects over 1 billion people, pushing hundreds of millions of people into extreme poverty. The situation has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic and is compounded further by multiple humanitarian and climate crises as well as political divisions and conflicts within and among countries. All these make upholding the human right to health and building sustainable health systems an uphill task.

Panel 1 which was on “Universal Health Coverage: Expanding our ambition for health and well-being in post-COVID world” brought together Member States and observers of the General Assembly, the UN system, parliamentarians, nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector. The panel was co-chaired by the Health Ministers of Sweden and Kenya with four speakers. It focused on the importance of the Primary Health Care (PHC) approach in achieving UHC. Discussions advocated for the value of engaging with patients and communities in order to promote health access and prevent health emergencies. Innovative solutions to the integration of primary health care across the SDGs were highlighted.

It should be noted that the SDGs were adopted by UNGA in 2015 and are applicable to all UN member states following a consultative process after the expiry of the Millennium Development Goals which targeted certain countries and were handed down for implementation. In 2019 UNGA debated the health agenda and called for radical orientation of health systems to PHC and UHC. Building on these previous commitments, UNGA 78 in 2023, focused on “Why the PHC approach matters and

Francis Omaswa, Founding CEO, African Center for Global Health and Social Transformation. Founding Executives Director of the Global Health Alliance and publisher Africa Health Journal

how to accelerate progress”.

It has been demonstrated in multiple studies that PHC works and is the only available approach that is able to reach all people where they live and work and using available resources. PHC is also able to build links and to support the higher-level health system. It is a gross failure of the global community that the calls of UNGA 2019 for radical orientation to PHC and UHC have not received the visibility and support that it needs. It is therefore the reason for UNGA 2023 to advocate and recommit to the 2019 call for radical orientation to PHC and UHC.

Bruce Aylward, the WHO Assistant Director General stated that “What they’re really putting the emphasis on is the fundamental need for UHC to make us more resilient – as communities and societies, as countries – to threats such as pandemics going forward but as well as others.” Aylward further stated that “they’ve really been focusing on three key things to achieve that”. These are equity that gets to everyone with full participation of communities themselves, funding the community health systems and addressing the needed PHC workforce.



**Prof. Omaswa with Colleagues at UNGA**

An impediment to the radical orientation to PHC and UHC is the historical baggage when these were misunderstood and were perceived as an attack on the medical establishment and utopian. It was confused with an exclusive focus on first-level care. For some, it looked cheap; poor care for poor people, a second-rate solution for the developing world. The key message of PHC approach however, is to place particular emphasis on local ownership and community participation. In doing so, it honours the resilience and ingenuity of our humanity and the human spirit and makes space for solutions created, owned and sustained by communities themselves.

During my statement to the Panel 1, I confirmed that PHC and UHC is the only way forward to achieve health related SDGs, that health is the purpose and outcome of all other SDGs and that acceleration is possible by radical shifts to people participation, community ownership and individual responsibility and participation as a duty and a right. The whole of government and whole of society approach with compassion and humanity through Intersectoral action. Above all, I appealed to all the delegates to UNGA 78 to recommit and return home not to business as usual but to be leaders and change agents in a renewed global movement to transform health systems towards PHC and UHC and for the UN family to monitor progress and report annually.