



Halle (Saale), 31 July 2023

Workshop

“Infectious Diseases beyond COVID-19” - 23.-24.05.23 Berlin

Overview & and final report for GLOHRA

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, as well as the Académie Nationale des Sciences et Techniques du Sénégal (ANSTS) and the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS), were co-organisers of the workshop “Infectious Diseases beyond COVID-19” in Berlin from 23-24 May 2023. It was the fourth event of a workshop series on Infectious Diseases for post-doc researchers from Africa and Europe, which ASSAf and Leopoldina initiated in 2016.

Even after COVID-19, Infectious Diseases remain a major global challenge. The focus on COVID-19 has reduced control measures for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, leading to a profound increase in cases and deaths. The increase in antimicrobial resistance further worsens the situation, which renders many infections difficult or even impossible to treat. The workshop participants exchanged experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic for future pandemics and re-emerging infectious diseases. The workshop offered a novel focus as it embedded the COVID-19 pandemic in a multidimensional relation to other infectious diseases. Dimensions included the negligence of infants and young children, malaria and tuberculosis during COVID-19, and the development of new technologies (e.g. AI) in detecting the relationship between climate change and the emergence of new infectious diseases or antimicrobial resistance.

The workshop provided a forum for direct dialogue and exchange between established and emerging scientists. The workshop featured a keynote lecture by Professor Salim S. Abdool Karim (Director of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa, Durban, South Africa) on the first day. In the panel discussions, established researchers, like Professor Beate Kampmann, Professor Joacim Rocklöv and Professor Ndèye Coumba Toure, discussed the issues mentioned above with emerging scholars from South Africa, e.g. Gabriela Croumhout, from Senegal, Ndèye Fatou Ngom, and from Ethiopia, Wondwossen Amogne. After these panel discussions, all participants continued the debate in the subsequent breakout sessions. The invited emerging scientists also presented their research in poster sessions. Other formats of the workshop included: a public roundtable discussion with stakeholders from politics, business and civil society; a session on innovation and entrepreneurship in Public Health in which speakers presented ways and experiences of knowledge exchange between science, industry, and society; and a field trip to the WHO Hub on Epidemic and Pandemic Intelligence.

The number of participants varied according to the different formats and sessions of the workshop. Thirty-eight participants attended both workshop days at the Max Planck Institute for Infection Biology. This number included eleven emerging scientists from the four partner organisations, nine

leading scholars and over ten participating guests. The public roundtable discussion had in total 95 guests.

The workshop included several highlights. One extraordinary session was the public roundtable discussion “Pandemic Preparedness beyond COVID-19 – Learn from the past, prepare for the future” at the Embassy of the South African Republic in Berlin on the evening of 23 May 2023. Beginning with the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between ASSAf and Leopoldina, in the subsequent public roundtable, different stakeholders from Europe and Africa discussed how pandemic preparedness can be increased globally to prepare for future pandemics. All participants agreed that “prevention is more effective than intervention and much more needed for future preparedness, but often at the same time more difficult to implement politically and socially.” A second claim from the participants was that “countries need to cooperate more equitably, especially in terms of capacity-building and technology development, with the so-called global south to attain future preparedness and intervention more efficiently”.

A second highlight was visiting Berlin's WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence. The WHO Hub facilitates “a global collaboration of partners from multiple sectors that supports countries and stakeholders to address future pandemic and epidemic risks with better access to data, analytical capacities, and tools and insights for decision-making.” It was established in 2021 with the support of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. Around 30 participants visited the WHO Hub on 23 May 2023. During this 105-minute visit, representatives from the Global AMR Hub in Berlin and several researchers from different sections of the WHO Hub presented their projects, e.g. the epidemic intelligence from Open Source (EIOS), to strengthen public health intelligence.

A third highlight was the “Special Session on Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Public Health” on the second day of the workshop. In this session, three leading experts presented ways and experiences of knowledge exchange and transfer between science, industry and society. Nina Spirit, from the Founding Walls Foundation, introduced to the general terminology (e.g entrepreneurship) and the process of developing a company from its research findings. Utz Dornberger, from the University of Leipzig, highlighted the steps, processes and challenges of creating a spinoff from the scientific results. The third speaker, Huwaida Bulhan from Roche/Genentech Inc., Kenya, presented how the pharmaceutical company Roche intends to overcome disparities in clinical research, especially regarding underrepresented populations in clinical studies.

One central outcome of the workshop was undoubtedly networking. Due to the variety of sessions and mix of participants, emerging scientists networked with well-known, established scientists, like Beate Kampmann, Salim Abdool Karim or Joacim Rocklöv. Also, new contacts and ideas of working collaborations were created between emerging scientists from different countries. Besides the internal networking, the workshop also facilitated the networking towards global health facilities and relevant stakeholders in Berlin. Besides networking, participants plan to publish joint articles and possibly follow up on future collaborations. ASSAf and Leopoldina are elaborating on a joint publication in the form of a policy brief which will be presented to a large public audience.

The overall evaluation of the workshop by the participants has been excellent. The data of the assessment suggests that the workshop received a five out of five on crucial questions about the quality and implementation of the workshop. Participants praised the structure of the workshop with its variety of sessions. For future workshops, the participants proposed extending the workshop's duration and inviting more emerging scientists.

With a possible increase in workshop participants come financial and logistical challenges, which the organisers already faced in this year's event: Financial restraints on the side of other organising

partners needed to allow for inviting more emerging scientists. Visa regulations, delayed proceedings and other legal travel issues also restricted the number of emerging participants.

The support of GLOHRA was beneficial in making this workshop such a successful and unique event.