



# CDT-Africa News



A Quarterly Newsletter of the Center for Innovative Drug Development and Therapeutic Trials for Africa



## Editorial

Welcome to CDT-Africa’s quarterly newsletter. Our team has been busy over the past three months and this newsletter summarizes the major activities during January-March 2023. One of the highlights was the launch of publications on COVID – 19 that included original work, reviews and reflections. Living for 3 years with the pandemic, it was important to reflect on the lessons learned from one of the major pandemics of the century.

Probably the most important challenge for controlling the pandemic in Africa was the shortage of diagnostic tests that prohibited timely evaluation of the national spread of the disease. Alternative tracking methods need to be developed while working on improving capabilities for local diagnostic development. The health and economic impact of COVID-19 was also high reflecting the fragility and the broader lack of diversity of the economic foundations of the continent. On the other hand, vaccine acceptance appears relatively good with most people constrained by lack of access implying that the most important barrier to vaccination was unavailability of vaccines.

Though COVID-19 is on the decline, major challenges remain for Africa. It is important to remain vigilant and draw critical lessons for preventing future pandemics and “build back better”.

i) Deploying simple alternatives for tracking the spread and impact of pandemics, as was tested in the published papers, may have utility. ii) While vaccines are critical for the control of pandemics, it is availability than hesitancy that is the bottleneck of vaccination. International partners and governments cannot use the “talk” of vaccine hesitancy to “get off the hook”. iii) Continental initiatives may enhance and energize the commitment to make essential medicines within Africa. But it is critical that countries, particularly those with large populations like Ethiopia, lead the way by creating the required infrastructure, systems, and human capabilities. iv) Building back better requires assimilating the lessons from the pandemic, creating diverse and more resilient economy that also engages biotechnology for local manufacturing, and construing a more equitable and caring social system.

Thanks for reading and look forward to working with you!

January-March 2023

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## CDT-Africa launches first of its kind training program on 'Planning and Implementing Centers of Excellence'



Partial view of participants at the 1st round of the training held at Seferu Selam Campus

CDT-Africa is pleased to announce the launch of first of its kind training program on 'Planning and implementing centers of excellence' in January 2023. The program is a highly interactive practical five-days training.

Excellence is an essential tool to address the seemingly intractable and wicked national and global problems. In the current highly competitive world, excellence also helps individuals, institutions, and nations to stand out. Centers of Excellence (CoEs) transform institutions by pulling resources and highly skilled individuals together for a predefined cause. The hope behind an almost half a billion investment by African nations, through a World Bank IDA program to establish African Centers of Excellence (ACE), has been



Participants during group discussion

that these ACEs would address fundamental development challenges of Africa by building specialist human capabilities to address the continent's development challenges and implementing new ways of working.

However, there are only few leaders and implementers who are very well versed with the concept of CoE, and the procedures for implementing and sustaining or scaling up CoEs. .... Continues on P3



## CDT-Africa launches first of its kind training program on 'Planning and Implementing Centers of Excellence' ...Continued

Why and when should an institute employ a CoE model? What are the necessary steps in setting up a CoE for success? What role can a host organization play for the success of CoEs? Based on the learnings from the opportunities and challenges of establishing a vibrant regional CoE, the Addis Ababa University's CDT-Africa team has prepared this training. Implementers and leaders of CoE host institutions will particularly find the training useful.

The course is not a project management training or training on institutional leadership although some of the principles may apply for these tasks as well.

While the training is specifically developed for CoE teams—both with existing CoEs and those interested in initiating institutional or national CoEs—the training is also suitable for individuals interested in personal excellence with a view of contributing to national and global change.



Dr Mekdes, one of the participants presents summary of her group's discussion

At the end of this five-day training, course participants will be equipped with transformative awareness of excellence, be able to develop or revise their implementation plans, prepare to implement their CoEs successfully or accelerate their CoE implementation.

If you are interested in the training program please contact: Ms. Samrawit Ketema (Samryket@yahoo.com) or Dr. Geremew Tarkekegne (geremewtt@gmail.com)



Some of the training instructors

## CDT-Africa launches publications on Covid – 19 Consequences and Lessons Learned



**'Covid-19 Two Years On: Consequences and Lessons Learned'** CDT-Africa published a special issue on the Ethiopian Medical Journal 2022 (October 2022 volume 60 supplement I), which is also available online (<https://emjema.org/index.php/EMJ/issue/view/64>). The printed copies were launched on December 30, at the Ras Makonnen Hall of the Addis Ababa University.

The published papers tested mHealth based national clinical surveillance on the spread of covid-19, adherence to control measures and vaccine hesitancy. The regional pattern of the pandemic and its economic impact in Ethiopia were also evaluated. The issue was forward looking and made explicit recommendations on preventing and controlling future pandemics. Establishing world-class knowledge translation units and medical discovery capabilities; harnessing innovations and partnerships; building dependable higher education & research institutes were considered the key foundations to a healthy, secure & prosperous Africa capable of tackling future pandemics.

During the launching ceremony, Dr. Andualem Deneke, Chief Executive Director of the College of Health Sciences (CHS) highlighted the major role the College played in the control of Covid -19 pandemic. This included implementation of structures, protocols, availing its scientists to support guideline development and engagement in the national response.

In his keynote speech, Professor Tassew W/Hanna, AAU President noted how tremendously the COVID-19 epidemic challenged the nation. He also noted the commendable work of the Ethiopian government in controlling the epidemic. The Ministry of Health led from the front putting into use the extensive diaspora network and effective communication strategy. He highlighted that the university was part of a big network of researchers that advocated for Africa not to be left behind when drugs and vaccines were developed. This had direct relevance to ensuring access to vaccines to Ethiopia and the rest of Africa when vaccines became available.

He stated AAU has also made substantial contributions to

the understanding of the pandemic, and control efforts through direct interventions, research and innovation. CDT-Africa, one of the centers of excellence of AAU, has been part of this effort. The Centre has worked to inform and fight infodemic; worked directly with responsible authorities to support policy and guideline development; and continues to be engaged in research and innovation.

CDT-Africa Centre Leader, Professor Abebaw Fekadu noted that Covid-19 was one of the major pandemics of the past 100 years. He appreciated the role of leadership from national to ministerial level which was consistent, coordinated, and decisive. He also noted the remarkable job the health care providers have done in dealing with the pandemic.



One of the key puzzles still remaining is how to avoid or control another pandemic without the disruption or impact that was caused by Covid-19. He noted how important it was to reflect carefully at this juncture on the key lessons of the pandemic for preventing a similar or worse pandemic.

He pointed out four fundamental lessons to be drawn:

- (1) The need for capable and empowered national/regional knowledge translation centers to synthesize and translate rapidly evolving evidence during pandemics to inform policy and practice.
- (2) Importance of harnessing the power of global partnerships: Pandemics, as shown during COVID-19, attract global partnerships. Thus, mechanisms should be devised to use partnerships to control or mitigate consequences of pandemics.
- (3) Urgency of improving the innovation ecosystem drastically: The unprecedented drive for innovations during pandemics requires flexible and robust systems to absorb them.
- (4) Need for producing critical medical supplies within country: The extreme dependence of Africa on imports constituted an existential threat for Africa and must be addressed as a priority.

Various important questions were raised from institution leaders and the media that attended the launch event.



## PROFORMA project holds 6th consortium meeting in Addis Ababa



The 6th PROFORMA (The Pharmacovigilance infrastructure and post-marketing surveillance system capacity building for Medicine regulatory and harmonization in Africa) consortium annual meeting was held from 30th January—3rd February, 2023 in Addis Ababa. The project has established collaboration between National Medicine Regulatory Authorities, public health programs and medical universities to work together to monitor medicine safety and ensure suitability of the pharmacovigilance capacity in the four countries; Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda.

The project started in April 2018. The Consortium constitutes five medical universities and four national medicine regulatory authorities including Addis Ababa University, Karolinska Institute, Muhimbili University of health and applied Sciences, University of Rwanda, and university of Nairobi, the Ethiopian Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), Tanzania Medicines and Medical devices Authority, Pharmacy and Poisons Board, Kenya, Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority, and Netherlands pharmacovigilance Centre, Lareb.

In his keynote address delivered through his representative, Professor Tassew W/Hanna, AAU President said, the past three years have been one of the most challenging periods in our recent history. Covid-19 was a particular threat to Africa because of the almost complete import dependence for essential medicines, including vaccines and diagnostics. The capacity to ensure safety of these imported products, and in the near future, products manufactured within country is paramount. He noted that the university has dedicated CDT-Africa to this particular task.

The role of academic institutions is significant to ensure the sustainability of the pharmacovigilance capacity built, he said. Through the project AAU has engaged in creating a critical mass of pharmacovigilance-trained staff supporting the EFDA to ensure safety of the medicines and vaccines

used by the public.

Ms. Heran Gerba, Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority Director said that pharmacovigilance mainly aims at improving patient care and safety in relation to the use of medicines and all medical and paramedical interventions. It also improves public health and safety by contributing in the assessment of benefit, harm, effectiveness and risk of medicines.

The provision and distribution of quality and safe medicines and vaccines play an important role in accessing health services to our population, she said. Assuring the safety of medicines and vaccines used in our health care systems requires a well-established pharmacovigilance system. Consortiums like PROFORMA are very critical for establishing a base in establishing a sustainable pharmacovigilance system by allowing sharing of experiences and pool of expertise in pharmacovigilance. She appreciated the PROFORMA initiatives to strength the national pharmacovigilance capacity and assured commitment to improve patient safety.

Professor Eleni Aklilu, PROFORMA Project Coordinator discussed key activities carried out through the project in 1. Baseline assessment of pharmacovigilance systems to identify gaps for intervention 2. Active Safety surveillance to establish the safety of treatment regimens used in Preventive Chemotherapy 3. Vaccine active safety surveillance 4. Pharmacovigilance capacity building.

Through the project a total of 11 postgraduate students (6 PhDs + 5 MSc) have been trained in pharmacovigilance, clinical trials regulation and post-marketing surveillance. PROFORMA engaged over 30,000 participants as part of its primary study.

More than 20 people attended the hybrid meeting which was held for five consecutive days.

## SPARK conducts 2nd annual scientific meeting & clinical trials training in Ethiopia



# Spark

Supporting African communities  
to improve mental health in kids  
with developmental disorders

SPARK (SuPporting African communities to increase the Resilience and mental health of Kids with developmental disorders and their caregivers) project held its 2nd annual meeting here in Addis Ababa from 20th -23rd February 2023.

The four-year project, which was launched in 2020, is a collaboration between King's College London, and Oxford University in the UK, CDT-Africa Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) and Aga Khan



University in Kenya and the World Health Organization (WHO) and funded through the NIHR Research and Innovation for Global Health Transformation (RIGHT) scheme.

Families with children with developmental disorders (including autism and intellectual disability) from low income countries experience severe challenges and most families receive no formal support. The project aims to conduct a cluster randomised controlled trial of a co-developed integrated community-based care model for children with developmental delay that promotes identification and referral of children with developmental delay, community-based support and inclusion.

“Families who have children with developmental disorders experience severe challenges, including social isolation, stigma and poverty. SPARK allows us to work with families, policy-makers and advocates to conduct high-quality research generating evidence on how to implement a sustainable model of care for these families in a context of high need and extremely limited resources,” said Dr. Rosa Hoekstra, co-principal investigator of SPARK about the impact of the project.

There is vast unmet need of families with a child with developmental disorders in Ethiopia – the project allows a chance to make a difference with high-quality research on what works to improve lives, Professor Charlotte Hanlon, SPARK co-investigator and in-country PI (Ethiopia) said.

During the meeting, each country team presented and discussed the implementation progress. The meeting was followed by a training workshop on Clinical Trials for Complex Intervention.



## CDT-Africa marks International Women's Day 2023

CDT-Africa marked International Women's Day on March 8, 2023 at Seferi Selam Campus in honor of its female staffs who are rolling up their sleeves to make a difference in peoples' lives.

During the luncheon ceremony, Professor Abebaw Fekadu, CDT-Africa Centre Leader appreciated the incredible women working at CDT-Africa. "We are pleased to have such dedicated, hard-working, and inspiring women working with us at CDT-Africa who deserve our recognition."

Discussion was held on what can be done to bring more women in science in leadership positions.



Prof. Gail Davey (right), and Dr Tsion Minas (left) in conversation

Professor Gail Davey was invited as a guest speaker as an exemplary woman in science. Professor Gail Davey is a medical epidemiologist specializing in skin-related Neglected Tropical Diseases. She has worked to raise local and international profile of podoconiosis, advocating for its inclusion in the WHO list of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs); guiding the foundation of the Ethiopian National Podoconiosis Action Network (NaPAN); and establishing Footwork, the International Podoconiosis Initiative. In discussions with Dr Tsion Minas, a Fulbright scholar at CDT-Africa, Prof. Gail highlighted her path she followed as a female scientist to reach where she got to.



Hardworking team of women at CDT-Africa

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## CDT-Africa partners with King's College London for NIHR Global Health Research Group on Homelessness and Severe Mental Illness in Africa (HOPE)



The project was formally launched on Tuesday March 14, 2023 in Addis Ababa.

Researchers from the Centre for Innovative Drug Development and Therapeutic Trials for Africa (CDT-Africa) at Addis Ababa University are working with the Centre for Global Mental Health at King's College London to develop and evaluate innovations, through the HOPE project, to support people who are homeless and have mental illness in Ethiopia, Ghana and Kenya.

During the panel discussion held in connection with the launching ceremony, Ato Lelisa Amanuel, Senior Technical Advisor of the State Minister of the Ministry of Health Ethiopia said the number of people who are homeless with severe mental health is high in Ethiopia. It is important to talk about the correlation of mental health and homelessness. He concluded by remarking that, though, we can't say we have done enough to address the problem, we have started an encouraging journey both at governmental and non-governmental organisation levels. He expressed the commitment of the Ministry to support the project and any endeavour to alleviate the problem.



Participants from each country shared their country's experiences and interventions as well as gaps in addressing the problem.

HOPE brings together people with lived experience of mental illness, researchers, implementers and policy-makers. The four-year project aims to identify the priority needs and valued outcomes of those who are homeless and have severe mental illness; Integrate global and local evidence to select and co-produce interventions; Evaluate the impact and costs of co-produced interventions; Generate evidence-based guidance on how to implement interventions; Pioneer the development of methods and ethical frameworks; and build sustainable capacity across partners.



## CDT-Africa co-organized Ethiopia 2050 Initiative Education Task Force meeting on Education quality

CDT-Africa had the opportunity to co-organize a workshop on “Enhancing Quality of Education and Centers of Excellence” here in Addis Ababa on January 4th 2023. The meeting was co-organised by CDT-Africa and the Ethiopia 2050 Initiative’s Education Task Force to discuss the main challenges in education quality in Ethiopia and assess what Ethiopia 2050 can do to improve it.



Professor Sebsebe Demissie, chair of the Education Taskforce, welcomed the participants noting the objectives of the meeting.

Professor Samuel Kinde, co-founder of the Ethiopia2050 Initiative said Ethiopia’s population is projected to reach 190-200 million by 2050. By 2100 Ethiopia will be likely the 8th most populous country in the world. This has its own opportunities and challenges. He highlighted how important it was to take advantage of this unparalleled opportunity by ensuring that the education that is being provided equips students for what is yet to come.

His Excellency Dr Samuel Kifle, State Minister of Ministry of Education, highlighted the need for investing on education and building the capacity of teachers. He noted the huge opportunity presented by the fast growing population and the structural changes in the country but that the education system has a critical role in this.

He also underlined the important role Centers of Excellence (CoEs) play to serve as a benchmark that can be multiplied in other areas. These CoE can help set excellence standard.

Other invited speakers included Professor Atalay Ayele, Member of the Education Taskforce who highlighted the need to support Ministry of Education and support model schools, centers, and colleges to develop CoEs which can serve as models.

Dr. Elazar Tadesse, also member of the Taskforce spoke about the state of elementary and secondary education in Ethiopia. She indicated the access to education has significantly improved, however, there is clear need in improving education quality. She mentioned Teachers Training and improving their welfare, Leadership training for administrators, Use of ICT and digital literacy as key points to improve education quality. Further problems in the elementary education system, particularly in the area of achievement of key milestones, such as reading ability, were presented by Dr Belay Hagos based on studies in primary schools.

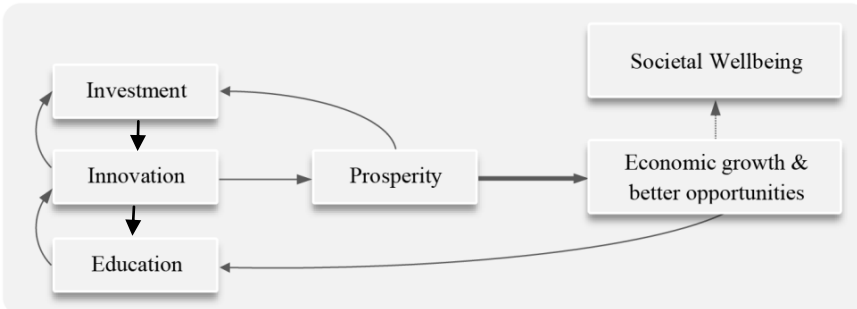
Professor Abebaw Fekadu, member of the Education Taskforce and Centre Leader of CDT-Africa, presented in detail about the potential role of CoEs in improving the education quality in Ethiopia. He noted that excellence as a broader agenda has the ability to transform nations not just the education system. In this regard CoEs, if planned and implemented in the right way, can transform education and address other major developmental challenges. He shared the experience of the CoE he leads.

Ethiopia 2050 initiative brings together like-minded Ethiopian engineers, architects, and planners who are concerned that as Ethiopia’s population continues to grow dramatically the scale of challenges that await the country in terms of basic and critical infrastructures in energy, water, food, housing, transportation, renewable resources, etc., are staggering. The group seeks thoughtful, practical, and bold solutions to address these societal challenges.

# Transforming Least Developed Countries requires transforming their higher education system

(March 6, 2023) 46 countries, accounting for 14% of the global population, are designated as Least Developed Countries (LDC) ... the “poorest” and “most vulnerable” nations in the world. The list includes Ethiopia. The UN has organized its 5th decennial conference in Doha, Qatar 5-9 March 2023. LDCs will benefit from every bit of help they can get.

Is the UN serious about supporting these countries transform themselves into resilient and sustainable economies? Are LDC governments serious about changing course? Is Ethiopia serious about attaining ‘prosperity’? I believe the answer to these questions is “yes” ---an emphatic yes. But the proof will be on what the UN/international partners and LDCs prioritize.



The sure way to get to sustainable prosperity is through transforming the higher education system. This will ensure LDCs acquire the required critical mass of educated workers to shoulder and sustain the huge human development need in these countries.

While higher education is expanding with increasing number of graduates, the invest-

ment in it so far has been minuscule and untargeted. There is a need for a new investment paradigm ... an “Investment-for-Innovation-Paradigm”.

There should be a purposeful investment with a clear path towards innovation and development. For example, every year in Ethiopia, at least 1000 chemists graduate. And similar number of biologists, physicists, and engineers. Yet, the country has not been spared from importing virtually all its essential medicines or essential chemicals. How much value is added in the extractive industry? Why is Africa still under the burden of neglected tropical diseases without a clear prospect of eradication?

There is a need to make drastic changes in the higher education system. Commitment of partners expressed through events such as the LDC5 and through concrete actions can help a great deal. In relation to higher education, we suggest the following:

First, targeted investment should focus on transforming higher education institutions into innovation institutions. Secondly, development partners must invest in helping LDCs transform their higher education and vocational training systems. While finance is important, the major assistance needed is in constructing the path to innovation. Planners, trainers, mentors, and infrastructure are all critical elements and must be part of the support package. Thirdly, governments should expect more from their higher education institutions. Along with investment, strong accountability mechanisms must be put in place. Governments cannot afford to be distant or allow excuses. Finally, LDC governments should transform their innovation ecosystem. This should include the innovation development, quality assurance, intellectual property protection and marketing systems.

Partnership is a critical tool for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The LDC5 is an important indicator of the goodwill of the global community to partner with LDCs to achieve SDGs. However, for partnership to have meaningful impact on LDCs, it cannot be framed as a business partnership alone, as seems to be the case in the SDG implementation plan. A different incentive mechanism for partnership with long-term goals must be envisaged. Partnerships should empower LDCs and offer the required choice, freedom, and autonomy to allow them to have active role in the global economy and human development.

Is the UN and other partners serious about assisting LDCs meet the SDG targets by 2030? Then, they should prioritise providing holistic support for higher education. Without such support, the world will have to wait a new global development agenda to achieve sustainable human development. (This article was first published on [www.cdt-africa.org](http://www.cdt-africa.org) on March 6, 2023)

CDT-Africa was established by Addis Ababa University with support from the World Bank as Africa Centre of Excellence for education & research to build endogenous capacity to improve access to drugs, vaccines & diagnostics in Africa and conduct complex interventions.

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