

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REMARKS

Welcome to the July edition of the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC) newsletter! As we approach the halfway point of the year, it is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the remarkable progress and achievements we have made thus far.

In this newsletter, we are excited to share the latest updates from the International Centre of Excellence for Malaria Research (ICEMR) annual meeting, where valuable insights and breakthroughs were discussed to combat this infectious disease. We also delve into the successful launch of the Uganda Learning Hub. This platform promises to be a pivotal resource in our research endeavours.

Furthermore, we are thrilled to highlight the recent team-building football tournament, which fostered camaraderie among our team and reaffirmed our commitment to working together towards our common goals. The Annual General Meeting and our participation at the World Malaria Day 2024 commemoration in Kibuku were other significant events during which we reflected on our achievements, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

We have an exciting line-up of upcoming events and initiatives that aim to strengthen our collaboration further and drive impactful research.

I encourage you to explore the contents of this newsletter, stay informed, and actively engage with the diverse activities and opportunities ahead. Your continued support and dedication are vital as we strive to contribute meaningfully to the global fight against diseases that affect public health.

Thank you for being a part of our journey. We look forward to your active participation in the exciting developments.



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UNITING GLOBAL EXPERTS TO COMBAT MALARIA: ICEMR ANNUAL NETWORKING MEETING 2024



The International Center of Excellence for Malaria Research (ICEMR) recently kicked off its highly anticipated three-day Annual Networking Meeting in Uganda from January 9th to January 11th, 2024. The meeting brought together experts in malaria research worldwide to exchange ideas and collaborate. Chaired by the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC) Executive Director, Professor Moses Kanya, it was a platform for sharing research findings and fostering partnerships towards a malaria-free future.

In his opening remarks, Professor Kanya set a tone of appreciation and purpose, emphasizing the collective commitment to combatting malaria. "A common goal unites us, and that is to fight malaria," he declared, highlighting the crucial impact of each attendee's contributions in potentially saving lives through research and initiatives.



Distinguished guests at the ICEMR Annual Networking Meeting included the Minister of Health, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, the Program Director for the ICEMR at the National Institute of Health, Dr Malla Rao, and the Director of Public Health at the Uganda Ministry of Health, Dr Daniel Kyabayinze provided a comprehensive overview of the malaria landscape in Uganda, shedding light on the country's high disease burden and the ongoing efforts in vector control strategies and case management.



Despite notable progress, Dr. Kyabayinze emphasised the importance of continuous research efforts, asking, "Why aren't we at zero yet? We need to do some work." Addressing the resistance issue in malaria control strategies, he highlighted the pressing concern of insecticide resistance as a significant threat. "One of our threats is to our tools, and we've called for more research. It's insecticide resistance," noted Dr. Kyabayinze, underlining the urgency for innovative approaches to address evolving challenges.

Dr Kyabayinze also raised awareness about the changing behaviour of malaria vectors, including the emergence of insecticide-resistant strains and the shift to urban settings. These developments necessitate vigilant surveillance and adaptive strategies to mitigate the effective spread of the malaria parasite. Identifying vectors capable of spreading malaria in urban regions emerged as a critical focus, prompting further investigation for proactive prevention measures.



Leading health experts Dr. Daniel Kyabayinze and Prof. Moses Kanya join forces to tackle malaria in Uganda, highlighting the importance of unified efforts in the fight against this deadly disease.

"We must join forces and work together as a global community and eliminate this debilitating disease."

-Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, Minister of Health

In her address, Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, the Minister of Health of Uganda, stressed the significance of global collaboration in malaria control efforts, calling for united actions to eliminate this persistent health threat. "Malaria continues to pose a significant threat to the health and well-being of our people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. We must join forces and work together as a global community to eliminate this debilitating disease," emphasized Dr. Aceng.



Minister of Health, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, advocates for global network in combating malaria at the Annual ICEMR networking meeting.



She highlighted the essential role of research and development in creating practical tools for malaria prevention and treatment, advocating for enhanced community engagement, increased funding, and ongoing research to strengthen healthcare systems. Dr Aceng reiterated the Ministry's commitment to supporting research organizations like IDRC and its partners, fostering a collaborative environment for impactful malaria research in Uganda.

The Annual Networking Meeting was a platform for diving deep into the complexities of malaria control strategies and innovative research findings. Dr Samuel Gonahasa from IDRC took centre stage, shedding light on Uganda's malaria control landscape and the hurdles faced, notably insecticide resistance associated with bed nets.

Dr Gonahasa elucidated the country's universal coverage campaign and the diverse distribution channels leveraged to reach communities in his presentation effectively. Highlighting the results of his research, he shared, "Parasite prevalence at 12 months following bed net distribution was close to 25% for both PBO and pyriproxyfen-treated nets." Moreover, he emphasized the significance of the interventions by stating, "Through an interactive time series analysis, we observed a 40% reduction in malaria incidence in the PBO net group during the first year compared to the counterfactual scenario without interventions."

Delving into the efficacy and durability of long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLIN), Dr Gonahasa pointed out critical aspects during his address, underlining the implications of prolonged usage of LLINs. He also touched upon the limitations of LLINs, saying, "We've learned that NETs are effective at reducing the malaria burden, but the protection they provide does not last the anticipated three years as we had hoped."



Deputy Executive Director, Dr Joaniter Nankabirwa enlightens attendees on advanced malaria case management strategies at the annual ICEMR networking meeting.



Dr Samuel Gonahasa enlightens audiences on Uganda's malaria control landscape and the challenges faced.



Dr Gonahasa further discussed the LLINEUP 2 trial outcomes, emphasizing the need to embed such trials into national implementation programs for practical intervention evaluation. He stressed the importance of investing in human resources and exploring innovative strategies to enhance the long-term effectiveness of LLINs.

Another notable presenter, Lillian Kayondo, delved into the entomological surveillance of vector species composition and insecticide resistance. Kayondo's presentation highlighted the intricate dynamics between interventions and vector populations, showcasing the challenges in combating resistance and the necessity for continuous monitoring and adaptation.

The ICEMR Annual Networking Meeting was enriched by insightful presentations from the IDRC team and researchers worldwide, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange in malaria research.



Lilian Kayondo sheds light on the battle against malaria: Unveiling the impact of vector control interventions on insecticide resistance and species composition.

“We've learned that NETs are effective at reducing the malaria burden, but the protection they provide does not last the anticipated three years as we had hoped.”

-Dr. Samuel Gonahasa, IDRC

The collective expertise of researchers such as Dr. Gonahasa and Ms. Kayondo showcased the intricate web of challenges and strategies in Uganda's malaria control efforts, emphasizing the urgent need for innovative approaches. The meeting's global appeal drew insights from esteemed experts, highlighting a collaborative ethos and a shared mission to propel malaria research to new heights, leading to more effective interventions against this persistent disease.



Dr Emmanuel Arinaitwe engaging in insightful discussions on molecular epidemiology and serology during the panel session



One of the international presenters, Christopher Chikhosi Stanley, hails from the Malaria Alert Centre at Kamuzu University of Health Sciences in Malawi. He presented pioneering research on malaria infection reservoirs, shedding light on progress and challenges in combating the disease among different age groups. The data shared by Stanley is poised to guide tailored strategies to tackle malaria transmission, specifically in Malawi, enriching the arsenal of tools in the fight against malaria.

Beyond the intellectual exchanges, the event provided a dynamic blend of social activities to foster camaraderie among attendees. From a glamorous gala dinner enabling networking opportunities to an exhilarating exploration of the natural wonders of Lake Mbuuro National Park, participants were treated to enriching experiences that enhanced the overall event engagement. The memorable dinner by the lake, featuring cultural performances, added a vibrant touch to the cultural exchange element of the gathering.

In his closing reflections, Professor Moses Kanya extended gratitude to all presenters and attendees, underscoring the pivotal role of the networking meeting in promoting knowledge sharing and fostering collaborative endeavours. The ICEMR Annual Networking Meeting showcased ground-breaking research by the IDRC team and researchers from diverse geographies. It deepened insights into malaria epidemiology, management, and control strategies. The event reaffirmed the collective commitment to combatting the global health threat posed by malaria, setting the stage for continued progress and collaboration in this vital field.



Christopher Chikhosi Stanley from the Malaria Alert Centre presents data on malaria in Malawi highlighting progress in combating the disease. School-age children identified as key drivers of transmission as efforts continue to reduce prevalence among the youngest population.



Networking amidst nature: ICEMR annual meeting attendees unwind at gala dinner after a day of exploring Lake Mbuuro National Park's wonders.

Uganda Learning Hub Launches to Revolutionize Immunisation Equity Strategies

The Uganda Learning Hub for Immunisation Equity was launched on Wednesday, 27th March 2024, at the Protea Hotel in Kampala. Funded by Gavi, it is one of four learning hubs implemented in Bangladesh, Mali, and Nigeria. The overall aim of the learning hubs is to generate evidence on practical approaches to identifying, reaching, and monitoring zero-dose children (those who miss DPT1) and missed communities.

This initiative is being implemented in Uganda by the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC) in collaboration with the Makerere School of Public Health (MakSPH) and PATH. The overall objective of the Uganda learning hub is to generate evidence on identifying and reaching Zero Dose children (ZDC), Under Immunised (UI) children, and missed communities in Uganda to inform immunisation equity interventions.

Specifically, the Learning hub aims to 1) characterise the zero-dose child and understand the barriers to reaching them, 2) determine the implementation outcomes (effectiveness, acceptability, reach, adoption, fidelity, cost and sustainability) of existing and planned interventions to reach zero-dose, under-immunised children and missed communities and 3) evaluate the utility of different data capture platforms to identify zero-dose, under-immunised children, and missed communities in Uganda.

Building on lessons from the Gavi 4.0 strategy, the Gavi Alliance developed a five-step framework: - Identify-Reach-Monitor-Measure-Advocate (IRMMA) to ensure a more systematic approach to programming Alliance support to reach zero-dose and under-immunised children. The Learning Hubs will generate evidence based on the IRMMA framework to improve immunisation program policies and guidance at national and global levels.



Prof. Moses Kamyia highlights the power of collaboration for improving immunisation equity, recognizing key stakeholders and district representatives at the Uganda Learning Hub Launch.



Dr Gustavo Corrêa unveils the Learning Hub initiative! Addressing the fragmented evidence generation at 4.0, LH aims to enhance timely information delivery & maximize evidence utilization through IRMMA alignment and zero dose learning agenda.



Expressing gratitude for the diverse representation, Prof. Moses Kamyá, the Executive Director at IDRC, acknowledged key stakeholders from organisations like the Uganda National Expanded Program on Immunisation (UNEPI), PATH, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), CDC, WHO, Makerere University, Uganda Paediatric Association, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), Living Goods, Compassion International, and USAID in attendance emphasising the importance of collaboration in improving immunisation equity. The launch also had subnational/district level representation, including district health officers, EPI focal persons, and biostatisticians from Wakiso, Kamuli, Mubende, and Kasese districts.

During his address at the Uganda Learning Hub launch, Dr Gustavo Corrêa stressed the importance of utilising data to inform the program's rapid-cycle strategies. Dr Corrêa highlighted the need for flexibility in monitoring and reaching zero-dose children, emphasising the significance of outcome levels such as coverage and other indicators like stockouts that need monitoring.



Dr Gustavo Corrêa emphasizes data-driven strategies for reaching zero-dose children during his address at the Uganda Learning Hub Launch.

“When we set up this strategy, we understood this is very new. We don't know how to do that. We never purposefully tried to reach these systematically missed communities.”- Dr Gustavo Corrêa

Dr Corrêa said, "When we set up this strategy (the Gavi 5.0 strategy hinged on equity), we understood this is very new. We don't know how to do that. We never purposefully tried to reach these systematically missed communities." Dr Corrêa further outlined the objectives of the learning hub initiative, stating that it aims to address the gaps in sharing learning experiences across countries.



WHO's Dr Annet Kisakye chairs the Uganda Learning Hub Launch.





He explained, "The learning hub is our flagship project for learning about zero-dose. It generates evidence, engages stakeholders, and synthesises learning to guide programmatic action." Dr Corrêa emphasised the hub's role in creating a platform for continuous learning and collaboration to improve immunisation strategies for reaching children who have been consistently missed.

During the launch, Dr Rita Atugonza, Deputy Manager for the Immunisation Program at the Ministry of Health, highlighted the progress and challenges Uganda's immunisation efforts faced. Dr Atugonza emphasised the importance of targeting zero-dose and under-immunised children to prevent severe complications and fatalities, emphasising the need for collaborative efforts. She expressed optimism in working with partners like USAID, CDC, WHO, and UNICEF to address these challenges through initiatives such as the Equity Accelerator Fund, leveraging data and knowledge for effective program implementation.

Faith Namugaya, representing the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC), gave an overview of the learning hub, outlining the project's specific objectives and timelines. The project spans from February 2023 to December 2025 and focuses on the Wakiso, Mubende, and Kasese districts. She described the sub-studies/methodology, including rapid assessments, targeted community surveys, and health facility assessments conducted in collaboration with the local communities.

Jacqueline Anena from PATH presented findings from the rapid assessment, which focused on estimating the number of zero-dose children in Uganda and the barriers to reaching them. Jacqueline discussed the cross-cutting obstacles faced by health workers in reaching zero-dose children, including fears of adverse events and concerns about multiple injections. Jacqueline highlighted issues such as understaffing, irregular outreaches, and vaccine stockouts that compounded the challenges of immunisation efforts.

Additionally, she addressed the unique challenges fishing communities face, including irregular immunisation outreaches and gaps in data capture due to population mobility. Jacqueline's presentation underscored the need for targeted interventions and improved service delivery to ensure that all children receive essential vaccinations, regardless of location or circumstances.



Faith Namugaya from IDRC and Dr Allen Kabagenyi from Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH) discuss the key objectives and outcomes of the Learning Hub project, focusing on identifying zero dose and under-immunized children.



Jacqueline Anena from PATH sheds light on the challenges in reaching zero dose children in Uganda.



The Uganda Learning Hub for Immunisation Equity was inaugurated by Dr Allan Muruta Niyonzima, Commissioner of Integrated Epidemiology, Surveillance, and Public Health Emergencies at the Ministry of Health, who expressed gratitude during the launch event. Dr Muruta thanked the funders, the Vaccine Alliance, and the consortium implementing the learning hub in Uganda, recognising partners such as IDRC, MakSPH, and PATH. Stressing the significance of immunisation in reducing child mortality and addressing existing coverage disparities, he highlighted the importance of data-driven strategies in improving immunisation services.

As the learning hub was officially launched, a ceremonial sign-off took place. Notable consortium members, including Prof. Moses Kanya (IDRC), Dr Allen Kabagenyi (MakSPH), Prof. Peter Waiswa (MakSPH), Dr Emmanuel Mugisha (PATH), and Jacqueline Anena (PATH), participated in the inauguration. The event showcased collaborative efforts, with key beneficiaries like Dr Rita Atugonza and District Health Officers from Wakiso, Mubende, and Kasese underscoring the commitment to enhance healthcare education and practices in the region. Dr Muruta officially declared the learning hub, "I launch the Uganda Zero-Dose Learning Hub," underscoring the collaborative efforts of stakeholders and partners in advancing immunisation equity in Uganda.



Dr Allan Muruta Niyonzima emphasizes the critical role of immunisation in saving lives and promoting health equity during a compelling address on data-driven strategies for enhanced vaccination services.

"I launch the Uganda Zero Dose Learning Hub."

-Dr. Allan Muruta Niyonzima, Commissioner of Integrated Epidemiology, Surveillance and Public Health Emergencies at Ministry of Health Uganda

Dr Allen Kabagenyi from Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH) detailed plans for a targeted community survey focused on identifying zero-dose children. Highlighting the survey's importance in understanding and addressing barriers to reaching this vulnerable population, Dr Kabagenyi emphasised the need for equity-based interventions guided by data insights.

Faith Namugaya from IDRC discussed the challenges of current data capture systems and advocated for a community-level approach to effectively identifying zero-dose children.



Dr Allan Muruta Niyonzima launches the Uganda Learning Hub, a pivotal step towards advancing public health initiatives in the country.



Carol Kanya from IDRC shared insights on evaluating UNICEF's zero-dose technical support in the Wakiso and Kamuli districts, emphasising the importance of robust data capture systems for real-time data utilisation.

The panel discussion, moderated by Dr Annette Kisakye from the World Health Organisation, emphasised community engagement and data utilisation to effectively identify and reach zero-dose children. Speakers highlighted the importance of leveraging existing data systems and enhancing community collaboration to address this critical challenge. The UNEPI program manager stressed the importance of community engagement and utilising data systems for effective identification, stating, "The tiered health system extends from specialised hospitals to village health teams, creating a need for accurate data tracking from the community to the facility."

The discussions also involved speakers like the District Health Officer (DHO) from Mubende, Mr John Bosco Ssendikaddiwa, who highlighted the importance of house-to-house visits for effective identification, stating, "The issue of house-to-house is very, very delightful." The DHO also emphasised the need to address challenges related to the size of districts and the delivery of health services to remote areas.

Emily Cheptoek from UNEPI suggested strategies such as effectively registering children from birth to track their immunisation status and integrating school vaccination services to reduce under-immunised children. A representative from the service delivery committee in UNEPI emphasised the importance of constant supervision, outreaches, and leadership at different levels to ensure effective reach and coverage of immunisation services.

Dr Emmanuel Mugisha from PATH presented findings from the learning agenda for immunisation, emphasising collaboration and collective learning to address program challenges effectively. Professor Moses Kanya from IDRC echoed the sentiment, highlighting the value of lessons learned and the need for ongoing collaboration to drive positive outcomes in the immunisation landscape.

As stakeholders reflected on the event's insights, the focus remained on collaborative efforts, shared learning, and a commitment to sustainable improvements in vaccination programs. The call for continued engagement and commitment underscored the collective responsibility required to achieve lasting progress in immunisation equity.



Professor Moses Kanya and Dr Gustavo Corrêa join forces to officially inaugurate the Uganda Learning Hub, heralding a new era of educational excellence and empowerment.



Dr Annet Kisakye leads engaging panel discussions at the grand launch of the Uganda Learning Hub, inspiring innovation and collaboration in education.



UPCOMING EVENTS



INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE

Get ready for the International AIDS Conference hosted by the International AIDS Society (IAS) from July 22nd to 26th in Munich, Germany! IDRC will be front and center presenting our groundbreaking research work in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Don't miss this opportunity to engage with leading scientists, policymakers, healthcare professionals, and advocates in shaping evidence-based responses to HIV and related epidemics. Together, we can make a difference!

 JULY 22   JULY 26 **GERMANY**

 More Information
<https://www.iasociety.org/conferences/aids2024>



GET READY

<https://www.iasociety.org/conferences/aids2024>
Munich, Germany



SEARCH SAPHIRE STAKEHOLDER MEETING

Mark your calendars for the upcoming SEARCH SAPHIRE stakeholders meeting on 10th October in Kampala, along with an exciting retreat in Kenya on 7th October 2024. Stay tuned for important updates and key insights that will be revealed during the meeting.

RETREAT  OCTOBER 7

MEETING  OCTOBER 10



ASTMH Annual Meeting

 **New Orleans**
November 13th-17th 2024

Join us at the ASTMH Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Get ready to dive into the scientific and clinical advancements in tropical medicine, hygiene, and global health with our IDRC team presenting our research on malaria at this international forum, where eminent experts and thought leaders will share world-class research findings and topical discussions over five insightful days.



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