

Health Systems Resilience against Public Health Emergencies and Roles of Regional Laboratory Network; Efforts in Africa

On December 15, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) hosted a side event on health system resilience to public health emergencies and the roles of the regional laboratory network at the Tokyo Prince Hotel. Panelists from the WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFRO), the Ghana Health Service (GHS), the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (Nigeria CDC), the Africa Centres for Diseases Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) gave presentations. After the panel session, there was a signing ceremony for a Letter of Intent between the Africa CDC and JICA with the aim of promoting their partnership.

Countries need to have resilient health systems in order to ensure access to quality essential health services even when there is a health emergency. While universal health care (UHC) is basically pursued by each country within its own health systems which reflect the local context, efforts for pandemic preparedness need to be made not only within individual countries but also collectively in regions, due to the ability of pandemics to spread. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 underscored the importance of regional efforts and collaboration, and collaboration has grown among existing networks such as WHO Emerging and Dangerous Pathogens Laboratory Network (EDPLN) and new ones such as Africa CDC's Regional Integrated Surveillance and Laboratory Network (RISLNET) in the areas of capacity building, norms and standards, mutual learning and the sharing of experiences. With this background, the side event presented examples of national and regional efforts to strengthen preparedness for health emergencies. The side event also explored how these regional and global efforts (especially surveillance and laboratory networking) can contribute to the achievement of UHC in constituent countries.

Ms. Kumagai, Director General of Human Development Department of JICA, gave the opening remarks, in which she addressed the importance of collective efforts in health security and her hope for an active discussion. Dr. Dovlo, Director of the Health System/Service Unit of AFRO, presented AFRO's activities and described the importance of health system resilience. Dr. Nsiah-Asare, Director General of GHS, presented a surveillance system involving communities in Ghana. Dr. Ihekweazu, Chief Executive of Nigeria CDC, presented new challenges that Nigeria CDC has in integrating programs fragmented by diseases and in attaining UHC through health system strengthening. Dr. Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC, which was newly established in 2017, followed and presented the Africa CDC's vision to link five regional collaborating centers and public health institutes in order to cover a wide area and to respond to local needs.

Dr. Simonds from the US CDC and Dr. Thwin from USAID took the podium as partners that have supported the establishment of the Africa CDC. Dr. Simonds presented US CDC's support for the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) and the Joint External Evaluation (JEE). He explained that efforts for health emergencies promotes UHC because preparedness for health emergencies makes it possible to avoid health system dysfunctions in emergency situations and because a public health approach facilitates equity. Dr. Thwin introduced the idea of one health as the principal approach of USAID. She said that USAID is considering innovative cooperation in various fields including the utilization of IT technology.

Q and A session with the panelists



In response to the presentations, an active Q&A session was held.

After the session, the participants witnessed the signing ceremony of the Letter of Intent between the Africa CDC and JICA to facilitate and accelerate the partnership between the two agencies. Dr. Nkengasong of Africa CDC and Dr. Toda, Vice President for Human Security and Global Health of JICA, signed the Letter of Intent accompanied by two board members of the Africa CDC. In a speech, Dr. Toda noted how he admired ownership of Africa, concluding that the resilience in Africa contributes to global resilience and, in turn, human security.



Dr. Nkengasong and Dr. Toda at the signing ceremony.

Speakers

Dr. Delanyo Dovlo, Director, Health Systems and Services Cluster, WHO Regional Office for Africa

Dr. Anthony Nsiah-Asare, Director General, Ghana Health Service

Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu, Chief Executive, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control

Dr. John Nkengasong, Director, Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Robert James Simonds, Senior Policy Advisor, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Aye Aye Thwin, Special Advisor to the Assistant Administrator at the Bureau for Global Health, US Agency for International Development

Moderator

Ikuo Takizawa, Deputy Director General, Human Development Department, JICA

Opening remarks

Mitsuko Kumagai, Director General of Human Development Department, JICA

Signers

Dr. John Nkengasong, Director, Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Takao Toda, Vice President for Human Security and Global Health, JICA