

Africa Needs a New Public Health Order

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Africa is challenged by rapid population growth, which is leading to increased and rapid population movement across the continent and the world. This mobility exacerbates the dangers of existing endemic diseases such as HIV, TB, and Malaria, emerging infectious pathogens, and non-communicable diseases. Two years ago, on January 31, 2017, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) was officially launched in Addis Ababa. The Africa CDC mission is to strengthen the capacities, capabilities, and partnerships of Africa's public health institutions based on science, policy, and data-driven interventions and programs.

Africa is at a pivotal moment in its history as it moves towards greater integration. Developments such as the opening up of the continent's skies with the single African air transport market, the African continent-wide free trade agreement, and freeing the movement of people across borders will bring the continent increasingly closer together. Though powerful boosters to economic growth, we must be mindful of the significant public health implications of these changes. In order to adequately position the continent to meet the public challenges associated with such economic and political integration, we at the Africa CDC are calling for the establishment of a New Public Health Order. This new health standard for Africa should focus on: 1) strengthening the national public health institutes of member states; 2) establishing the Regional Integrated Surveillance and Laboratory Network (RISLNET) that can pool existing assets in each geographic region; 3) developing the public



health workforce; 4) enhancing the culture of data acquisition, storage, timely use, and sharing; 5) public private partnerships; and 6) enhancing the coordination of partners and donors and their efforts in alignment with the Agenda 2063 for health.

In view of this, in December 2017, Africa CDC and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) signed a letter of intent for collaboration. JICA is committed to working with Africa CDC to strengthen the Regional Collaborating Centres and the RISLNET; support public health emergency preparedness and response; strengthen laboratory capacity and networks; support short, medium and long-term field epidemiological

and laboratory training programs; strengthen health systems; and support collaborative research. JICA has supported several African countries to develop state-of-the-art public health facilities in Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, and others. Such efforts are clearly welcome, and will contribute significantly to improving public health outcomes and impact on the continent, leading to a high indigenous capacity to respond to disease threats. As JICA continues to support Africa to improve public health outcomes on the continent, it is critical that the capacity of indigenous implementing partners and universities are strengthened and supported.

Profile:

Born in Cameroon, Dr. John Nkengasong is the director of the Africa CDC. He received a doctorate in Medical Sciences (Virology) from the University of Brussels, and has over 20 years of experience in researching and working in the field of disease control.