

REPORT OF THE 4th AFRICAN CONFERENCE OF EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Preamble

It will be recalled that at the end of the 3rd edition of the AFCONEID held in Accra in 2017, the decision was made to hold the 4th edition in Freetown Sierra Leone.

Consequently, a LOC headed by Prof. SahrGevao was constituted and saddled with the responsibility of determining the dates, venue and logistics for the annual event. The secretariat was also asked to determine the theme of the conference.

The LOC eventually picked the dates as September 26-28, 2018 and Radisson Blu Mamy Yoko as the preferred venue. The secretariat chose the theme “Managing the spectrum of data generated during disease outbreaks and Biosecurity threats”. This theme was premised on the need to determine or discuss the way to go with the expected data generated from the various interventions and researches during and immediately after the Ebola crises in west Africa.

The theme, venue and dates were eventually accepted by the Conference Management Team and preparations started for the event.

The LOC

The LOC was primarily driven by the country office of GET in SL which is headed by Prof. Gevao.

DAY 1

The programme started with the welcome speech by Prof. Gevao with Dr IsataWurie delivering a short welcome in support of Prof. Gevao. Thereafter, Prof Abayomi delivered the PI address. His address entitled “Data sharing in routine public health Vs public health emergencies”, on one hand highlighted the need for Africa to take charge of biosecurity and prepare adequately for emerging and re-emerging infectious disease and on the other hand stated the importance of the management of data generated from interventions such as witnessed in SL.

Dr Thomas T. Samba, the deputy chief medical officer of SL spoke on behalf of the minister of health and sanitation. He welcomed the delegates profusely while regretting the absence of the minister who has gone with the president for the UN meeting. He assured the delegates of the support of the SL government to ensure generated data is effectively utilised for the advancement of human health. He listed the effort of the government of SL post Ebola at ensuring a return to normalcy. He further stated and appreciated the efforts of GET which has assisted with data collection and training of personnel to better handle such epidemics in the future. He wished the delegates a happy deliberation.

Thereafter the conference went into plenary with the following presenters

1. Dr Edith Valles of the UN 1540 Committee: Actions to improve UNSC resolution 1540 implementation in Africa
2. Prof. Alan Christoffels who spoke to the topic: Towards an African Genome Archive

Immediately after lunch break, there was a breakaway session with one group having the CASE symposium while the second group had the BAOBAB LIMS biobanking software training facilitated by Prof Alan.

Day 2

It started with an opening by the moderator and then the keynote addresses which included the following speakers:

1. Presentation on Lagos Biobanking and Biosecurity project
2. Presentation by Sierra Leone Country Rep
3. Presentation by Guinean rep

The two presentations generated a robust discussion especially the Sierra Leonean being the first time their data was presented for public consumption. The data was well received.

Thereafter, the plenary session held with speakers such as

1. Prof. Tsai Chia-Wei on “BARDA’s Efforts to Address Emerging Infectious Disease Following the West Africa Ebola Outbreak

2. Froude Jeffrey on “US government’s Efforts to Address Emerging Infectious Disease post west africa Ebola Outbreak”.
3. Michaela Mayrhofer on “The benefit of collaboration – a European Research Infrastructure
4. Adia Benton
5. Jennifer Maroa
6. Williams Mpofu: Advancing Vaccine Development and Manufacturing in Africa
7. Daniel Bach: Outbreaks: The slow road to rapid control

Immediately after lunch, the CASE symposium and BAOBAB LIMS training continued as a breakaway session.

The secretariat and GET SL used this period to have a meeting with Medecin Sans Frontiers MSF, which is presently supporting a part of the GET SL project. The meeting held at the GET SL.

A GET AGM also held on the same day at the Radisson Blu later in the evening (Minute is attached).

Day 3

It started with a breakaway session for abstract presentation in two rooms. One group was moderated by Klement Jaidzeka while the other was moderated by Syntia Nchangwi. The presented abstracts generated robust discussion and contribution.

The keynote address by the Palladium group in Senegal was delivered by DouDouDiop to the larger breakaway session.

Immediately after lunch, Prof. Akin Osibogun assisted by Chioma Dan-Nwafor mounted the podium and announced the venue of the next conference as Abuja Nigeria.

Announcement: An invitation for the Lassa fever conference organised by NCDC for the 15-16 of Jan 2019 was extended to all.

Thereafter, E.J Momoh led the LOC to the podium and delivered a vote of thanks.

GET COO subsequently announced the end of the conference at about 2:00pm local time.

It should be mentioned that a conference partnership with AVMI was explored this year where AVMI had its meeting for two days preceding that of GET at the same venue. GET assisted it with the logistics of planning such as getting and negotiating the venue, securing visa as well as payment for their delegates among other things. Some of the delegates stayed over to attend our conference and a keynote address was delivered on behalf of the AVMI. It is hoped that such partnership can be strengthened with time and talks have been opened to achieve this.

Also worthy of note is that the Public Health England had a meeting on the opening day of GET conference at the same venue and some attendees joined the GET conference for the remaining days after their meeting.

There was a good representation of local participants at the conference. Worthy of note is the sponsorship of about 20 students of the College of Medicine and Health Science of Sierra Leone by the London School of Tropical Health through the Public Health England.

Some statistics

1. One hundred and thirty-nine participants were at the conference
2. Eleven were Ebola survivors.
3. Participants were drawn from about twelve countries.
4. Abstracts accepted was about fifty-five.
5. Only thirty-five registration was done online before the commencement of the conference.

Challenges

1. The online registration platform did not function so well, there were a lot of complaint of inability to register through the medium.
2. Lack of fund, which incapacitated planning considerably.