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Communiqué of 7TH AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON ONE HEALTH & BIOSECURITY

**Themed:
Universal Approach to Addressing Biosecurity
Threats: Genomic Intelligence and Vaccines.**

**Held:
Wednesday, 27 - Friday, 29
October, 2021.**

**At:
The Civic Center, Victoria Island
Lagos, Nigeria.**



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**Communiqué of
7th African Conference on One Health and
Biosecurity themed
*“Universal Approach to Addressing
Biosecurity Threats: Genomic Intelligence
and Vaccines”*
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Preamble

The 7th African Conference on One Health and Biosecurity themed Universal Approach to Addressing Biosecurity Threats: Genomic Intelligence and Vaccines held Wednesday, 27th – Friday 29 October 2021. The 7th edition of the annual conference was organised by Global Emerging Pathogens Treatment Consortium (GET Africa) with the support of the Lagos State Government and in partnership with key non-state institutions across the world with a focus on emerging infectious diseases and concerns around biosecurity and biosafety in the African Continent. The 3-day conference provided a unique forum for robust interactions on biosecurity threats and the imperative for genomic intelligence and efficient healthcare responses in Africa. The conference, attended by professionals and stakeholders across the sectors of the society, received presentations from resource persons cutting across the healthcare sector, agriculture, the environment, as well as from the development sector and civil society. The following observations and recommendations emerged following exhaustive deliberations:

Observations

1. In the age of genomic intelligence, which offers enormous prospects for efficient healthcare delivery, African countries should not be left behind, considering that the world is at the stage where technology should be fully deployed to respond to hazards of infections. Therefore, genomic sequencing should be part of the elaborate strategies to achieve the One Health objectives.
2. Improvement of infrastructure is key to achieving One Health policy, particularly as a way of integrating bio-safety into an efficient health delivery system.
3. Proper understanding of the microbial landscape and the dynamics of infections is critical in addressing biosecurity and biosafety and meeting the one-health initiative's goal.
4. Investment in biosecurity and biobank has become a compelling imperative for the health sector following the deployment of genomics in the wake of Ebola in 2014 and considering that genomic diagnosis has been deployed to unravel the pattern of mutation and infection of Lassa fever after over five decades.

5. Africa is on the verge of a significant antimicrobial resistance crisis even though the developments at the level of Africa CDC regarding the development of Africa Union AMR Framework, draft Policy for the legal framework for Antimicrobial Resistance Control in Africa and AMR Guidance point in the direction of great potential to reverse the trend.
6. Threat of bioterrorism is a reality with dire consequences for society and an overriding challenge for governments and security agencies.
7. Illicit trafficking has the potential of aggravating biosecurity threats in the maritime sector with dire consequences since nations across the world have become increasingly susceptible to biosecurity threats as a consequence of cross border movements.
8. In spite of remarkable progress made at the regional level, under the auspices of Africa CDC, in the development of Biosecurity Policy as an instrument for effective biosecurity in Africa, low research opportunities and capacity building pose a colossal challenge.
9. Effective biosecurity in Africa requires establishing a framework for the effective practice of biotechnology and biosafety with the necessary technological requirements, technical skills, and seamless networking among laboratories in Africa.
10. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in advancing biosecurity consciousness, pandemic management and genomic intelligence through advocacy and direct involvement of stakeholders' responses to emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
11. The COVID-19 pandemic has helped in highlighting the critical role of accessibility to data in driving decision making in pandemic preparedness and response, particularly concerning addressing issues within targeted groups in communities.
12. Lagos State was able to contain the COVID-19 outbreak by leveraging on the experience of the Ebola outbreak of 2014 which spurred the creation of the Lagos Biosecurity Council. Policy, infrastructure, training and collaboration were vital to the success. The Lagos Biobank, which encompasses Biobank, BSL2 and BSL3, provides a model for private sector participation in testing that can be adopted nationally and across sub-Saharan Africa.
13. There is generally poor record of political will on the part of African leaders to transit from mere adoption and assent to domestication and implementation of international

conventions, protocols and policies.

14. Climate change adaptation and mitigation are major issues to consider in biosecurity and biosafety in meeting the goal of the One Health initiative.
15. Environmental degradation, potentiated by untrammelled abuse as well as unsustainable interaction with the environment, is a significant driver of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases crisis in Africa

Conference Declaration

The conference agreed to deploy conscious engagement in demanding improved funding of research and development in the health sector in Africa with the view to prioritise capacity building and exchange of ideas on best practices amongst professionals, researchers and stakeholders towards addressing the emerging realities around biosecurity and one-health initiative. The conference reaffirmed commitment to genomics and precision medicine to address challenges of emerging diseases and pursue a clear roadmap with a strategic framework for vaccine accessibility, production, and distribution. Conference reiterated the importance of addressing antimicrobial resistance in the healthcare pipeline in the African Continent. Realising the need to sustain awareness of the international non-proliferation norms and biosecurity-related obligations, the conference resolved to demand improved commitment from governments of countries across Africa to existing obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and Resolution 1540 of the United Nations. The conference resolved to work with relevant state and non-state stakeholders to address legal, ethical and social issues to leverage the opportunities of genomic intelligence and biosecurity.

Recommendations



As a follow-up to the conference declaration, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Africa should be the leader in biosecurity development. Therefore, policymakers and governments should support scientists and health professionals to strengthen biosecurity. Medical and epidemiological services must be strengthened to guarantee biosecurity.
- ii. Consistent efforts towards building capacities to respond to emergencies and flattening the waves of infections should be at the core of the proactive strategies against adverse effects of emerging diseases.
- iii. African countries should strengthen their health system with the establishment of biobanks and biosecurity councils for effective deployment of responses against emerging infectious diseases
- iv. Local vaccine manufacture should be at the centre of making vaccines available to Africans. Thus African governments individually and collectively should invest in research and provide enabling environment for experts and investors to commit resources into research and production of vaccines in response to the attendant challenges of emerging infectious diseases. Assistance from international partners should be centred more around capacity building, research and development, as well as experience sharing.
- v. At the governmental level, Antimicrobial Resistance Control Guidance should be integrated into healthcare delivery systems while non-governmental stakeholders, including youth, faith-based organisations, CSOs, need to ramp up their involvement within sociocultural peculiarities of communities to conscientise towards behavioural changes.
- vi. There should be the deliberate, consistent and policy-driven intervention of the armed forces and other security agencies and immigration departments in averting and containing access of unauthorised persons and non-state actors to biological agents.
- vii. There is a need to develop a framework for establishing Africa Center for Genomics, Data Management and Bioinformatics as custodian of the repository for accessibility to molecular bioresource data in Africa.

viii. African leaders should take practical steps towards reversing long-lasting dependency on foreign donors in addressing health challenges by focusing on education, research and development, giving due recognition to indigenous innovations and harnessing the capacity of citizens within the region and in the Diaspora, as a significant step towards One Health initiative and wholesome prosperity.

ix. African countries should work closely with international partners to ensure adherence to common standards and compliance with binding Conventions, Protocols and international agreements.

Biosecurity, One Health.



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