SUMMARY

Urban Health in Africa Dialogue: Advancing Multidisciplinary Approaches

In February 2017, the *Urban Health in Africa Dialogue: Advancing Multidisciplinary Approaches* was held in Cape Town, South Africa. Co-hosts included the Novartis Foundation, the International Society for Urban Health (ISUH), the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) – Health, the International Council for Science (ICSU), the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), and the University of Basel, Switzerland.

Co-hosts opening the event: Jo Boufford, Roseanne Diab, Hedwig Kaiser and Ann Aerts.

Over the course of two days, the dialogue looked at emerging urban health challenges and opportunities in Africa. The meeting also explored frameworks required to promote research, education, and policy actions in urban health through collaborations among health professionals and urbanists. Priority areas of action were identified and the importance of engaging the other sectors and disciplines needed to address the broad determinants of urban health in these priority areas.

The Novartis Foundation introduced "Better Hearts Better Cities", a new multidisciplinary urban initiative that will address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – and specifically hypertension and its cardiovascular complications – in low-income urban settings.

All event participants from multiple sectors and disciplines

Health systems under pressure

Rapid urbanization in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is having a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of people living on the African continent. Health is intrinsic to an individual's social and economic well-being and should be a major consideration in the urban context.

While there is the unfinished agenda of infectious diseases and maternal and child health, as well as the constant threat of emerging new diseases, there is also an epidemiologic shift towards a rising tide of NCDs. In addition, African countries share the global challenges of demographic shifts reflecting longer life expectancy and an increased, aging population, rapid urbanization, and climate change. All factors that put additional strain on public health and healthcare systems.

Swiss Ambassador to South Africa Helene Budliger Artieda welcoming the international guests to Cape Town

Jörg Reinhardt, Chairman of the Board of Novartis and Chairman of the Novartis Foundation Board of Trustees speaking about challenges and opportunities for the changing landscape in healthcare

Urgent intervention is required to address these unprecedented health challenges and prepare for the future. This calls for innovation in how health services are created and managed in cities, but also, with 30% of land areas in African cities still to be built, there is an opportunity to plan better, healthier cities and improve the wellbeing of those who live and work there. If well managed, cities can lead to development for national economies, become hubs for technological innovation, and centers of positive social progress.

Urbanization trends: challenges and opportunities

For the first time ever, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for international development in the UN 2030 Agenda include a goal addressing cities (goal #11). At the same time, UN Habitat III has created the New Urban Agenda. These frameworks provide both context and stimulus for paying attention to cities as regional and national governments develop their long-term plans. They must be used to promote good planning, research and forward-thinking design, with constant attention to solutions that tackle health inequities. Public health and urban planning stakeholders should leave "no one and no space behind" in the pursuit of sustainable development and healthier cities.

John Seager speaking about the "History of Multi-disciplinary Urban Health initiatives in Africa"

Edgar Pieterse talking about "Urbanization in Africa"

Additional challenges of rapid urbanization which must be addressed in LMICs may include the barriers to promoting interdepartmental collaboration within governments; lack of political will to address health issues; rigid regulatory environments; and lack of funding. While migration into cities is a major reason for their growth, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 66%

of jobs outside agriculture are in the informal sector, and Africa's labor force is expected to triple over the next few years. Currently, less than 30% of the economically active people are in stable jobs. As Africa urbanizes, there simply are not enough work opportunities in cities, which leads to increased risk of poverty, disease and food insecurity and may stall economic development.

The need for a multisector approach

Finding practical solutions to existing and emerging urban health challenges is a complex process and cannot be addressed by one academic discipline or governmental sector alone. There is an urgent need for multidisciplinary and multisector approaches that balance social, economic and cultural growth as well as environmental protection in LMICs. The SDGs also require an inclusive process that explicitly addresses health inequities. Different sectors must work together to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, where the quality of governance that brings these sectors together is a critical driver for success.

In order to bridge the knowledge gap between sectors, more initiatives would be useful to get disciplines working together. Conferences, as well as facilitated dialogues, such as the World Café session held at this event in Cape Town, must be encouraged. Not only do they bring together the different constituencies, establish relationships and learn each other's languages, they also leverage the competitive advantage of each sector to co-develop an interdisciplinary intervention, research and policy agenda.

Tolu Oni and Sue Parnell presenting "Research Frameworks for Urban Health"

Carlos Dora on "Health and the Urban Environment"

Remy Sietchiping on "Policy and Planning for Urban Health"

Blaise Nguendo on "Educational Models for Urban Health"
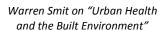
Understanding local context

Creating environments that support the prevention of emerging urban health problems, like heart disease and cancer, require a multidisciplinary operation of scale that is grounded in a systematic understanding of local realities and living conditions. These differ from city to city and even from neighborhood to neighborhood.

In addition, the urbanization picture is diverse across regions within Africa. For example, there are countries and regions that urbanized early, others that urbanized late, and there are agrarian and natural resource-based countries that have yet to see increased urbanization. A one-size-fits-all

approach is impractical, which emphasizes the need for understanding and analyzing the local context.

History also points to the importance of maintaining African leadership in setting up the new urban health agenda, with city initiatives started in African countries in the 1980s and 90s demonstrating that charismatic leaders can contribute to success. In addition, the SDGs call for donors and partners to work within a country lead framework. In a public-private partnership the solutions are ideally co-designed with all stakeholders, including the local authorities. Facilitated group discussions, like the World Café at this Urban Health Dialogue, can assist in getting parties to co-create.

Warren Smit on "Urban Health and the Built Environment"

Marcela Guerrero Casas on "Community Engagement in Achieving Urban Health"

Godfrey Tawodzera on "Planning a City to Enable the Health of its People"

The importance of education about health

Education is one of the key sectors to be prioritized when addressing large global health problems. A starting point would be embedding health education in schools. While some health-education toolkits already exist, making these widely available and accessible to schools in some LMICs remains a challenge. In addition, community members, especially in poorer communities, who may not have access to formal education (or digital technology) are important targets for educational efforts about their own personal health and broader

About 100 national and international participants joined the event

determinants that improve conditions in their communities. Education should, therefore, take place in formal and informal settings. While free toolkits could be distributed via digital, open-source environments, other non-digitized ways of distribution must be explored, too.

All countries, but especially LMICs cannot afford to produce another generation of professionals for the health sector or the urban planning sector, who don't understand the importance of health and the role that urban planning plays in creating healthy communities. Urban planners and professionals in other sectors, like transportation, housing, and the environment must understand the impact of their decisions on health outcomes. There is an opportunity for including health in the professional training curricula of most sectors. Disseminating existing research on the relationship between forward-thinking urban planning and health can also contribute to increased health literacy in urban populations.

Digital solutions and strategies.

The best research and health information about the African continent currently exists in a closed feedback loop that mainly feeds the health sector and, due to limits in dissemination through peer reviewed or grey literature publications, it is not used often enough to inform policy. Platforms that bring researchers together with policy makers and the public are required, and in this regard, information and communication technology (ICT) may be able to assist.

Conversations continued during the breaks

The potential of sharing research methodologies, data, evaluation methods and results on open websites can make it easier for others to use the same indicators and measures, to analyze the lessons and apply the results. Putting information in the public domain also gives civil society advocacy groups an opportunity to mobilize governments.

ICTs are invaluable in linking communities to healthcare workers. The Novartis Foundation, for example, has helped put in place communication networks between hypertension patients and healthcare workers in Vietnam and Ghana, using innovative digital and telecommunication models.

The role of other sectors and industries

Accountability is considered an important factor in achieving healthier urban environments, but responsibility should not only lie with city or country leaders. While building and maintaining the environment that connects people to work, transport, access health facilities or sanitation is often considered the domain of governments, the public sector cannot be the sole provider at a scale that meets the rapidly urbanizing populations. Action to address the SDGs speaks to the importance of private sector investments in making the necessary changes.

Structured conversations across sectors are required to create a common vision for what communities should look like. Non-health sectors (e.g. the mining sector in South Africa) should be involved from the start. An approach that draws on citizen engagement can assist political leadership in finding solutions in a more collaborative way. One example is Open Streets in Cape Town, a citizen-driven initiative that works to change the way inhabitants use, perceive and experience the built environment.

Addressing food security also requires a multisector approach: just like with strengthening health services, NGOs, city officials, private sector, researchers, philanthropists, the formal and informal employment sector, as well as governments should collaborate to find funding and sustainable solutions. The informal sector, and specifically food traders for example, must play its part in urban health too. But despite their importance, street traders often lack support and there is an opportunity to create a basic infrastructure to enable them to provide healthy food.

Academies of Science can play an important role in advancing urban health, in terms of assembling research findings and identifying research gaps. Academies use a systematic generation of insights from diverse scientific disciplines to usefully and independently inform policy. However, in order to bring such information to government level, improved communication with researchers is required. Academies are critical to bridging the science-policy gap in order to bring research to the attention of policymakers.

The role of the media in fast tracking the urban health agenda should be considered too. As a starting point, it could assist in breaking down difficult concepts into digestible chunks of information, giving urban-health problems a human face, and weaving policy issues into narrative-style articles.

Speakers on the last panel giving examples for realizing multi-disciplinary approaches in urban health: James Duminy, Carlos Dora, Richard Laing, Angela Mathee, Mia Malan (moderator), Cheryl Walter, Roberta Bosurgi, Hedwig Kaiser

World Café Small Group Discussions

A series of small group discussions were held to identify sectors and activities that are priorities for advancing the urban health agenda in Africa. Participants identified food, education and government as sectors that require urgent intervention:

- In the food sector, key actions include addressing the supply chain of healthy food; encouraging the local production of foods; providing education on food and nutrition; creating well-located spaces for the informal vendors who are the main sources of fresh produce in the poorest urban communities; and implementing taxes on unhealthy foods.

- In terms of education, actions include starting at school level to promote greater health literacy, continuing education of civil society and professionals, embedding information about health and its determinants in other disciplines as well as more traditional clinical education.

- Government-related interventions include unlocking resources, incentivizing non-state actors, and implementing regulations, taxes, policies and other ways to hold different stakeholders accountable.

- Across all sectors, the increasing role, responsibility and shared value of non-state actors, especially the private sector, was highlighted in addressing urban health challenges that are too complex for one sector to tackle alone.

Event participants engaging in interactive World Café Small Group Discussions

More information about the Novartis Foundation:
Website: www.novartisfoundation.org
Twitter: @NovartisFDN
Ann Aerts: @AnnAertsNF
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/novartis-foundation
YouTube: www.youtube.com/novartisfoundation

More information about partners:
International Society for Urban Health (ISUH): @IS_UrbanHealth, www.nyam.org/isuh/
InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) – Health: @IAPartnership, www.interacademies.org
Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf): @ASSAf_Official, https://www.assaf.org.za/
University of Basel: @UniBasel_en, www.unibas.ch

Co-hosts with Cairman and Ambassador:
Hedwig Kaiser, Helene Budliger Artieda, Jörg Reinhardt, Ann Aerts, Jo Boufford, Roseanne Diab