

REPORT OF CEBHA+ FOURTH ANNUAL NETWORKING MEETING



10-12 MARCH 2021

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1. BACKGROUND

The goal of CEBHA+ project is to build long-term capacity and infrastructure for evidence-based healthcare (EBHC) and seeks to engage policymakers and practitioners throughout the research process in order to build lasting relationships, enhance evidence uptake, and create long-term capacity among partner institutions in Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda in collaboration with two German universities. CEBHA+ consortium consists of the following nine institutions:

Table: Members of CEBHA+ Consortium

N ^o	Country	Institution
1	Ethiopia	Armauer Hansen Research Institute
2	German	-University of Freiburg (Cochrane Germany) -LMU Munich, Germany
3	Malawi	University of Malawi, Malawi
4	South Africa	-Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa, South Africa - Cochrane South Africa, South Africa - Stellenbosch University, South Africa
5	Rwanda	University of Rwanda
6	Uganda	University of Makerere

2. IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE OF THE CEBHA+ PROJECT

CEBHA+ project is structured in the following four research tasks:

- Research Task 1: Evidence-informed policies and practices on screening approaches for hypertension and diabetes, and those at high risk of cardiovascular disease in sub-Saharan Africa
- Research Task 2: Evidence-informed policies and practices on integrated models of healthcare delivery for hypertension and diabetes in sub-Saharan Africa
- Research Task 3: Evidence-informed policies and practices on population level interventions to prevent hypertension and diabetes in sub-Saharan Africa
- Research Task 4: Finding the evidence for improved implementation of road traffic injury prevention interventions

In addition to these four research tasks, there is i) a research task 5 which is tasked to provide technical support / advice on research methods across the first four mentioned research tasks, ii) Work package (WP) of capacity building for long term courses (PhD and Masters' programmes and short courses in various research areas) and WP of networking.

3. RATIONALE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CEBHA+ FOURTH NETWORKING MEETING

The project is designed in the way, each year, one of the project country partners host an annual networking meeting which aims to improve connectivity between all partners and promote close ties with policy-and-practice partners. The first, second, and third annual networking meetings were hosted by Uganda, Malawi and South Africa, respectively. The fourth project year (2021) was the time for Rwanda to host annual networking meeting. Thus, the CEBHA+ fourth annual networking meeting was hosted by Rwanda, from March 10th to 12th, 2021. All three previous CEBHA+ annual networking meetings held in-person but the present meeting was held virtually as a result of preventive measures against Covid-19 pandemic. However, CEBHA+ staff from Rwanda and key invitees attended the meeting together in a designed hall at University of Rwanda headquarter by respecting Covid-19 prevention measures.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE FOURTH ANNUAL NETWORKING MEETING

This CEBHA+ fourth networking was guided by the following five objectives:

- ◆ To review and celebrate achievements of the past
- ◆ To discuss challenges and how to overcome them
- ◆ To develop joint plans for remaining period of the project in the context of COVID-19 including in (pending) activity implementation, results dissemination, mentorship, and research exchange
- ◆ To reflect on the possible no-cost extension
- ◆ Review Health Africa Evaluation 2020 summary and discuss Recommendations

5. KEY NOTES DURING THE MEETING PER SESSION

5.1. DAY ONE: 10 MARCH 2021

Opening Session

At the beginning of this session, Prof RULISA Stephen, PI of CEBHA+ project in Rwanda, thanked participants of the meetings and introduced Guest of honour, Prof LYAMBABAJE Alexandre to the meeting. Prof RULISA continued his welcome remarks with a brief description of the CEBHA+ project; he said what CEBHA+ is and country partners. He also talked about the

implementation of CEBHA+ in Rwanda. At the end of his welcome remarks, Prof RULISA called up on Prof LYAMBABAJE Alexandre for his opening remarks.

In his opening remarks, Prof LYAMBABAJE Alexandre started with description of University of Rwanda history, then he expressed anticipation about the meeting which he considered as the opportunity to share success, best practices and challenges, learn from each other and find solutions of encountered challenges / difficulties in collaborative and cooperative manner. He, Prof LYAMBABAJE, ended his remarks by promising the continuing support from University of Rwanda in the remaining period of CBHA+ project implementation.



After the opening remarks, Germany coordinator, Eva Rehfues provided her remarks which was about to thank CBHA+ team from each country site for the progress made on the CEBHA+ project implementation despite the challenging time of the Covid-19 pandemic. She also emphasized on how CEBHA+ staff from German contributed to informing Covid-19 mitigation police.

This opening session was ended with remarks from Prof MAYANJA Harriet, CEBHA+ Coordinator in Africa. In her remarks, Prof MAYANJA expressed her thanks to all participants in general for attending the meeting and to CEBHA+ / Rwanda team for organizing the meeting.

Session one: Overall updates from each country

This session was designed in the way each country site of CEBHA+ makes the presentation which covers great successes, significant challenges and lessons learnt during the last three years of CEBHA+ implementation. Key notes are provided below:

a. Great successes included:

- Brief issues that were developed and published
- A number of manuscripts that were published. There are other manuscripts that were submitted in peer reviewed journals and are currently under review process.
- Some country sites (included Rwanda, Ethiopia, German) reported to have succeeded in stakeholders engagement

b. Significant challenges

- Unsurprisingly, all country sites reported that CEBHA+ project activities (like in-person data collection for some studies, meeting / workshops with stakeholders) were impacted by Covid-19 restriction measures.
- In Uganda, reshuffle of government officials affected stakeholders' engagement.
- In Malawi, political disturbances have delayed / stopped implementation of some CEBHA+ project activities

c. Lessons learnt

- Possibility to work via virtual platforms
- Engaging more than one staff, within one department or administrative entity, as stakeholders. This helps to avoid challenges that may occur on stakeholders' engagements in case of reshuffle of governmental officials.

Session two: Updates on each Research Task

At the time of this session, each research task (RT) was requested to make presentation on i) progress made per each activity, challenges and next steps. At the end of this session, overall observation is that RT5 is not involved protocol development and manuscript writing.

Session three: Overall update on integrated knowledge and translation (IKT)

During this section, Munich team first shared with meeting participants the updates on monitoring and evaluation of IKT. Key share information include i) publication of protocol of mixed methods evaluation of the CEBHA+ IKT approach, ii) quasi-complete data collection on mixed methods evaluation of the CEBHA+ IKT approach, iii) submission of two IKT-focused abstracts (one abstract is joint abstract, another one is Rwanda-specific IKT abstract). Afterwards, each country site provided an update on the implementation of IKT.

During this section, a concern about repository CEBHA+ products was raised and coordination office (Uganda) informed the participants that it has repository for products related to dissemination. Another discussion around stakeholders engagement and publication of issue briefs took long time. This discussion came up with the following recommendation:

- There is a need to engage bilateral and multilateral organizations working on NCDs, like Africa CDC
- Television programs should be included among the dissemination means
- Issue briefs should be integrated into international dissemination

Closing the day one

The remarks of closing day one was provided by Prof MAYANJA Harriet who also thanked the participants and Rwanda team for organizing the meeting.

5.2.DAY TWO: 11 MARCH 2021

The agenda of the second day consisted of i) Presentation on the progress of students projects, ii) Capacity building, iii) Additional funding from BMBF and iv) Way forward / next steps for each RT.

Session one: Presentation on the progress of students projects

The presentations were organized in the way it provides information on i) title of research project and supervisors / mentors, ii) Objectives / aims / goals, iii) Methods, iv) Results, v) Challenges and next steps. Only in South Africa where one PhD student has publications and in Malawi a PhD students has already collected data and is on the stage of writing papers, other PhD students are on the stage of submitting their proposal to ethics committee. In Rwanda, meeting participants indicated that scope of research projects of some PhD students is wide. In Uganda, a PhD student

expressed a lack of enough funds for this research project. One PhD student from Rwanda suggested a regularly / monthly meeting of all PhD students across all CEBHA+ consortium where they can share progress and challenges, and help each other. Capacity building on research methods was expressed as a common need among PhD students.

Key recommendations:

- Supervisors / mentors from Rwanda need to keep on helping their students to narrow the scope of the research project of their PhD students
- There must be a regularly meeting with PhD students

Session two: Capacity building

All trainings delivered during the last four years of CBHA+ project implementation were presented. It was reported that capacity building was heavily affected by Covid-19 pandemic. At the end of discussion, the following suggestions were provided by participants:

- Where possible, online means may be used to deliver the remaining trainings
- As there are many training sessions affected by Covid-19 pandemic, no cost extension was suggested

Session three: Additional funding from BMBF

Key notes during this session are the following:

- Fully based on site specific “formal offers” submitted to funder
- Deadlines:
 - i) All tasks to be completed by 31 December 2021
 - ii) All invoices to be submitted by 31 October 2021
- Question asked by one participant : How deadlines will be met since agreements have not yet been signed (i.e no disbursement was made)?
- Feedback: Grantees need to implement the project activities and report what will have done by the already set deadline, at this time funder will be approached for no cost extension
- Next steps:
 - ✓ Modification of activities where needed
 - ✓ Signing of contract and transfer of first payment
 - ✓ Implementation of activities

Session four: Way forward – Next steps

In this session, each RT leader make the presentation indicating the activities to be implementing during the rest period of project implementation

5.3.DAY THREE: 12 MARCH 2021

At the day three, last day, of the meeting the following sessions were held: i) Work package networking, ii) Finance and assets, iii) Feedback from advisory board members and iv) Next steps (open discussion).

Session one: Work package networking

- Research exchange is the most delayed activities of CEBHA+ even though there is a budget allocated to it. It was not implemented because of travel restrictions.
- Within countries, mentor-mentee connections were established. However, in Malawi, it was reported there is no pool of mentors while students need them.
- If a student expresses a need of mentorship in a given area, CEBHA+ needs to find a mentor within the CEBHA+ consortium; if not found try to find a mentor outside of network
- No budget allocated to this program
- If the issue of Covid-19 pandemic persists, there is a need to organize online mentorship and research exchange. Ethiopia is in the planning process of implementing online research exchange program.
- Once PhD student suggested that they need to have regularly / monthly meeting for all PhD students sponsored by CEBHA+ network in order to share progress, exchange challenges and learn from one another.
- All country sites are required to plan WP networking activities they are able to do and implement them
- There is an issue low attendance of the meetings of WP networking.

Session two: Finance and assets

- Key issue is that cash flow come late
- Way forward:

- ✓ Revise work plan and budget plan. Even though there is a need of (no cost) extension people should work on their timeline.
 - ✓ All country sites need to share with Africa CEBHA+ coordination report submitted to GIZ
 - ✓ Hold quarterly financial meeting and whenever necessary
 - ✓ Conduct immediate orientation / training of all new project staff
 - ✓ Continue to individually reach out CEBHA+ partner institutions
- There is no clear communication system established during the project design phase
 - No clarity on how no cost extension will be, there may be possibility to apply for it; meanwhile CEBHA+ country partners were advised to realistically revise work plan and budget plan according to the existing timeline.

Session three: Feedback from advisory board members

At the beginning of this session, Prof MAYANJA Harriet introduced all advisory board members and briefly made recap about what had been covered during the three days of the meeting. After the introductory speech of Prof MAYANJA Harriet, each Advisory Board Member present provided his speech in regard to the implementation CEBHA+ project and key notes from each are provided below:

Dr. Frode Forland

- From inception of the project at Amsterdam, many things were achieved.
- There is a need to understand how Covid-19 is being spread and how it has been spread in the global context
- A need to deal with publication not yet published and how they are reliable
- There is a need to have health system that takes care of non communicable diseases, outbreak and disasters
- All countries are obliged to support each other
- We can work in digital way
- This network is an example that we can work across countries and across continents
- There is a need to think how we can have cross collaboration with international organization like WHO, CDC, etc....
- We need to have global knowledge and contextualized knowledge
- We still have other disease like malaria, tuberculosis that we also need fight

Dr. Opa Tolova

- Expressed happiness because collaboration persisted despite challenges of Covid 19; policy briefs and manuscripts were published
- Congatulated all CEBHA+ students with their mentors on the progress so far made
- Covid 19 pandemic, political / administrative challenges affected the project
- Advised to approach policy makers and record political commitments
- Thanked Rwanda team for having prepared the meeting

Dr. Dzinkambani Kambalame

- There is good progress despite Covid-19 challenges
- Main challenges were reported , including Covid-19 restriction measures which delay accomplishment of many activities. In Malawi, since December 2020, there is a very deadly wave of Covid-19 which is very deadly and thus there is a need to find an innovative way to accomplish work plan.
- Each country need to have unique way to find solution
- Students should be mindful on the project timeline, they need to work fast to finish their program before project closure

Dr. Vincent Rusanganwa

- Expressed pleasure that Rwanda hosted the meeting
- The collaboration, as it is done in CEBHA+, can bring solution across the region and worldwide. All funding projects need to maintain the culture of collaboration.
- Covid-19 has showed us that our health systems are not resilient to face emerging diseases / outbreak. There is no way (to be resilient) without research. Thus, if the researchers request fund they need to be heard
- We collaborated with local researchers and hope it will continue
- Again thanked the researchers

Session four: Open discussion

After feedback for Advisory Board Members, there was open discussion during which all RT Lead had a final opportunity to share with the participants a way forward. During this session, key notes are:

- In all RTs, there are pending data collection activities that were affected by Covid-19 which will be resumed once situation of Covid-19 slows down, where possible research team need to have innovative way to collect data. All RTs are going to be busy with manuscripts writing and publication as there are data already collected.
- There is a need of guidance on journals for publication
- There is a need to find a way to disseminate the results across the continents

Closing remarks

This session was led by Prof RULISA Stephen, CEBHA+ Project / PI in Rwanda, who first all thanked all participants and expressed happiness for attendance. Before the closing remarks, Prof

RULISA requested Prof MAYANJA Harriet, CEBHA+ Africa Coordinator, and Eva Rehfuess, CABHA+ Germany Coordinator, to provide their remarks.

Prof MAYANJA Harriet, CEBHA+ Africa Coordinator, said that Covid 19 has taught us that we need to work together, she expressed that all countries are excellent in South –South collaboration and in North –South collaboration. She emphasized that Africans need to work each other and have resilience in doing research and writing proposals. At this occasion, she thanked CEBHA+ staff, students and Advisory Board Members. She also thanked Rwanda team for organizing the meeting. After she requested Eva Rehfuess to deliver her remarks on the side of German team.

In her remarks, Eva Rehfuess said that the meeting has allowed to find where each RT is, it (the meeting) has reported where the project is on the capacity building and stakeholders engagement. She thanked all CEBHA+ staff and expressed a need to continue collaboration, particularly she thanked Rwanda team to organize the meeting in difficult circumstances. She ended her remarks by thanking Advisory Board Members.

After the Eva Rehfuess' remarks, Prof MAYANJA Harriet led the session of hand over of annual networking meeting between Rwanda and Ethiopia, then it was officially declared that the next CEBHA+ annual networking meeting will held in Ethiopia.

After the handover session, Prof RULISA summarized what had been done or discussed during the three day meeting and then called up on Nathalie to provide her closing remarks.

In her closing remarks, Nathalie said that the project is making a good progress and appreciated how the meeting had gone and she officially closed the meeting.

APPENDIX: LIST OF CEBHA+ FOURTH ANNUAL NETWORKING MEETING