

Regional collaborative initiatives to strengthen occupational health and safety training programmes in southern Africa

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Access to occupational health and safety (OHS) is a fundamental, democratic and inalienable human rights issue. The embrace of holistic and systematic approaches to OHS practice at both national and organisational levels is key to guaranteeing access to this right. Furthermore, the promulgation of holistic and non-fragmented regulatory frameworks, together with dedicated enforcement of OHS laws, policies and systems, guarantees that fundamental right to workers. These systematic approaches and optimised enforcement of regulatory instruments are wholly dependent on the knowledge and intellectual capital of OHS practitioners and professionals. Training and capacity improvement in the field of OHS is a key and strategic leverage element in OHS. Proper implementation of OHS laws requires mature OHS training programmes.¹ The southern African region has long-standing glaring and gross inadequacies in human resources capacity and skills.² Moyo et al. (2015)³ further state that the lack of specialised training in occupational health in southern African has been a major challenge. However, there has

been a remarkable change since the World Bank partnered with four project countries (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia), the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD) and the East, Central and Southern African Health Communities (ECSA-HC). The main aim is to curb the scourge of tuberculosis and occupational lung diseases in miners, ex-miners, their dependents, and people living in the vicinity of mining areas, labour-sending areas, transport corridors, etc.⁴

The project is making great strides in strengthening OHS training programmes in southern African countries. One of the recent activities was a collaborative initiative between the AUDA-NEPAD, Copperbelt University (CBU), the Occupational Health and Safety Institute (OHSI), and the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Public Health (Wits SPH). AUDA-NEPAD organised the collaboration through the request from CBU and OHSI. Currently, CBU is in the process of starting a new curriculum in OHS at masters and PhD levels. It is envisaged that, through this collaboration, content



Left to right: Dr Masekameni (Wits University), Dr Moyo (Wits University/MSU), Dr Singogo (MoH), Lt Col. Prof. Ngoma (CBU vice-chancellor), Mr N Khoza and Ms M Chilubi (manager: Regional CoE on OHS)

Photograph: Norman Khoza (AUDA-NEPAD)

relevant to the African sub-population will be the basis for the new curriculum. The partnership will start with eight post-graduate students who will be nested in collaborative projects. Mr Norman Khoza, current president of the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH) emphasised the need for a programme to be recognised by the Institute. He outlined the key modules for these training courses, in line with current trends in the training of occupational hygienists and OHS professionals. He also outlined the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA) modules that could be undertaken in collaboration with the Zambian government and the private sector. The SAIOH would support these training programmes to advance regional growth of the occupational hygiene footprint.

On 18 February 2020, a technical meeting was held at the OHSI with the collaborative institutions. The key high-level deliverables of the meeting were:

- The need to develop tailor-made OHS short courses relevant to the Zambian sub-population, spearheaded by Wits University, over a period of two years, was recognised. Thereafter, the OHSI will take over the programme.
- The CBU-Africa Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Mining (CBU-ACESM) will host courses offered by Wits University, in collaboration with the OHSI.
- Wits University and the CBU will collaborate on supervision of PhD and masters environmental and occupational hygiene student research supervision.
- AUDA-NEPAD emphasised the need to publish project results which could influence policy reform on the African continent.
- AUDA-NEPAD implored the collaborative institutions to recognise the Africa Agenda 2063 as a guiding roadmap and tool to advance sustainable development on the African continent.
- The collaborative institutions agreed on the need to strengthen resource mobilisation efforts in advancing OHS practice in the region.
- AUDA-NEPAD will facilitate the establishment of the regional technical working group on OHS in support of the research agenda at the Centre of Excellence.

On 19 February 2020, a collaborative meeting and tour to CBU-ACESM were held at CBU to re-emphasise the need and importance of collaboration. The meeting followed the successful technical meeting on 18 February. The key drivers in the meeting included the need to support each other in areas of research and resource mobilisation. After the meeting at the Centre of Excellence, a courtesy visit was made to the vice-chancellor of CBU, Lieutenant Colonel Professor Naison Ngoma, who welcomed the delegation and reiterated the importance of the collaboration. Prof. Ngoma highlighted the value of such strategic alliances and institutional collaboration. He pledged his full support to the initiative and implored all partners to commit to this strategic vision. Moreover, the vice-chancellor encouraged the staff of CBU to take advantage of the collaboration since AUDA-NEPAD, South Africa and Zambia have sufficient resources and expertise to drive the OHS research agenda on the continent.

Present in the meeting were Mr Norman Khoza (AUDA-NEPAD),

Dr Dingani Moyo (MSU and Wits University), Dr Daniel Masekameni (Wits University), Prof. Jameson Mbale (CBU inaugural director of research and consultancy), Mr Patrick Hayumbu (CBU), Dr Fwasa Singogo (Ministry of Health – Zambia), Dr Indrah Sen Singh (CBU head of Department of Chemistry), and Ms Mafwenko Chilubi (Centre of Excellence on Occupational Health and Safety).

Dr Daniel Masekameni gave a guest lecture on the importance of research and understanding of exposure science as a key policy reform enabler. Mr Norman Khoza presented a brief overview of the need for universities to understand the African Union's strategy and declarations. One of such roadmaps is the Union's Agenda 2063 which is the blueprint of the continental developmental agenda. One of the Union's seven 'aspirations for the Africa we want' advocates for a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.⁵ For this aspiration to be realised, we need a sound educational system in all corners of the continent. We must be determined to eradicate poverty and build shared prosperity through a social and economic transformation of the continent.

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