

AUDA-NEPAD COVID-19/OSH regional response activities

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INTRODUCTION

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been unprecedented with significant, extensive and far-reaching consequences for the health and safety of working populations. Africa has not been spared despite the pandemic shifting much later into the African space than most other continents. The pandemic has disrupted the working space and affected all workplace-related safety and health programmes. This includes activities such as workplace tuberculosis (TB) and HIV programmes, due to the shift of attention to the pandemic. As the pandemic gathers momentum in Africa, an urgent need has arisen to guide the continent in articulating strategic and intelligent responses to curtail the potentially devastating effects of COVID-19. As of 7 August 2020, the 55 African Union (AU) member states reported 976 208 confirmed cases, 21 050 deaths and more than 651 455 recoveries from COVID-19. To date, South Africa is heavily affected, with more than half (53%) of the cases on the continent; six nations in Africa account for 78% of the confirmed cases.¹ If the epidemiological and scientific predictions are correct, the continent is likely to see a drop in the number of cases as it moves out of the winter season. However, this might not be entirely true, primarily due to the implemented lockdown and use of masks that might have assisted to curb the spread of the normal flu virus as well as SARS-CoV-2.

Tuberculosis amongst healthcare workers in southern Africa was the leading occupational infectious disease prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Health workers are particularly vulnerable to the drug-resistant tuberculosis contagion, a risk that is exacerbated by the COVID-19-induced personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages and their quality challenges, and general staff shortages that have crippled TB and HIV care at primary healthcare facilities. This is further exacerbated by fear of healthcare workers to perform even cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on patients with breathing difficulties, as it is perceived to be dangerous. We cannot forget the high prevalence of tuberculosis and occupational lung diseases in this region.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the African Union Commission, African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), and International Labour Organization (ILO) assumed key and strategic roles in guiding the African continent through several key

initiatives, including the development of key occupational safety and health (OSH)/COVID-19 guidance documents and policies, and on-going training and education on COVID-19 and OSH at workplaces. Through the harnessing of available continental expertise and home-grown solutions, the AUDA-NEPAD championed the setting up of an AU OSH expert group to spearhead the African response to COVID-19.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

World Day for Safety and Health at Work commemoration

AUDA-NEPAD and the ILO organised the World Day for Safety and Health at Work commemoration as part of the response to accidents and occupational injuries awareness. The World Day was held on 28 April 2020, under the theme *Stop the Pandemic: Occupational Safety and Health Can Save Lives*. The sub-theme was *Saluting health workers in the fight against COVID-19*. This was facilitated through AUDA's newly-established AU Expert Group. Three hundred and sixty-nine participants from 38 African countries and 11 countries outside Africa attended the webinar. Speakers were drawn from the ILO, African Union Commission (AUC), AUDA-NEPAD, International Organisation of Employers (IOE-Africa), International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa), Africa Centre for Communicable Diseases (CDC), and OSHAfrica. Messages of support came from Mr Rene LeBlanc, president of the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA); Ms Claudina Nogueira, International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) vice president for Scientific Committees, and Mr Kevin Hedges and Ms Marianne Levitsky from Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB).

AU EXPERT GROUP AND SUB-COMMITTEES

The African Union Commission (AUC), AUDA, ILO, and other OSH technical and developmental partners established an AU OSH Expert Group in response to the impact of COVID-19 on OSH in workplaces. The committee is divided into two sub-committees, viz. the OSH/COVID-19 Guideline Committee, and the OSH/COVID-19 Training Committee.

Table 1. OSH/COVID-19 guidelines

#	Publication title and ISBN	Contributors	Reviewers
1	AU COVID-19/OSH Risk Assessment Guidelines ISBN: 978-1-990962-91-2	Mr Norman Khoza ^a Mr Sean Chester ^b	Ms Bulelwa Huna ^m Ms Elizabeth Lourens ⁿ Mr Warren Mallon ⁿ Ms Jabulile Mhlophe ⁿ Mr Wellington Mudenha ^o Dr Dingani Moyo ^e
2	NEPAD AU COVID-19/OSH Guidelines for Mining Industries ISBN: 978-0-621-48631-5	Mr Norman Khoza ^a Dr Talkmore Maruta ^c Dr Thuthula Balfour ^d	Ms Bulelwa Huna ^m Ms Elizabeth Lourens ⁿ Mr Warren Mallon ⁿ Ms Jabulile Mhlophe ⁿ Dr Dingani Moyo ^e
3	AU COVID-19/OSH Guidelines for the Occupational Safety, Health and Wellness of Health Workers ISBN: 978-0-621-48632-2	Dr Dingani Moyo ^e	Ms Bulelwa Huna ^m Ms Elizabeth Lourens ⁿ Mr Warren Mallon ⁿ Ms Jabulile Mhlophe ⁿ
4	AU COVID-19/OSH Guidelines for Education Sector ISBN: 978-0-621-48633-9	Dr Charles Mburu ^f Dr Onyimbo Kerama ^g Ms Petrina Nghidengwa ^h Ms Peneyambeko Alina Munkawa ⁱ	Ms Bulelwa Huna ^m Ms Elizabeth Lourens ⁿ Mr Warren Mallon ⁿ Ms Jabulile Mhlophe ⁿ Mr Norman Khoza ^a Dr Dingani Moyo ^e
5	AU COVID-19/OSH Guidelines for Food and Retail Sector ISBN: 978-0-621-48634-6	Ndinomholo Hamatui ^j George Mwiya Mukosiku ^k Peneyambeko Alina Munkawa ^l	Ms Bulelwa Huna ^m Ms Elizabeth Lourens ⁿ Mr Warren Mallon ⁿ Ms Jabulile Mhlophe ⁿ Dr Dingani Moyo ^e
6	AU COVID-19/OSH Clinical Occupation Health Guidelines ISBN: 978-0-621-48635-3	Dr Dingani Moyo ^e Dr Lanre Ajayi ^l	Ms Bulelwa Huna ^m Ms Elizabeth Lourens ⁿ Mr Warren Mallon ⁿ Ms Jabulile Mhlophe ⁿ Dr Talkmore Maruta ^c Dr Dingani Moyo ^e

^a AUDA-NEPAD; OSH specialist, South Africa; ^b SAIOH registered occupational hygienist, APEX Environmental, South Africa; ^c Senior laboratory specialist, ECSA-HC, Tanzania; ^d Occupational health specialist, Minerals Council South Africa, South Africa; ^e Specialist occupational physician & OSH consultant, Baines Occupational Health Services, Zimbabwe; School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa; ^f Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya; ^g Occupational health specialist, DOSHS designated health practitioner, Kenya; ^h Deputy director, OHS, Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, Namibia; ⁱ OSH specialist, ILO, Decent Work Team for east and southern Africa (based in Zambia); ^j Namibian Institute of Environmental Health Research (Pty), Namibia; ^k Chief inspector of factories, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Zambia; ^l Occupational physician and OSH consultant, Medbury Medical Services, Nigeria; ^m Senior specialist, Occupational Health and Hygiene, Department of Employment and Labour, South Africa; ⁿ Specialist, Occupational Health and Hygiene, Department of Employment and Labour, South Africa; ^o SHEQ specialist, South Africa

TECHNICAL CONTENT TEAM

Ms Andriette Ferreira: AUDA-NEPAD Knowledge management design
 Ms Buhle Hlatshwayo: AUDA-NEPAD Communication specialist
 Ms Nthabiseng Moiloa: AUDA-NEPAD Projects administrator
 Mr Brian Mutale Nga'ndu: AUDA-NEPAD Monitoring & evaluation specialist

OSH/COVID-19 GUIDELINES DEVELOPMENT

The OSH/COVID-19 Guideline Committee has developed six guidelines to date. These were developed by experts on thematic areas, reviewed by subject specialists, and translated into French and Portuguese. Table 1 provides details about the guidelines.

OSH/COVID-19 REGIONAL TRAINING

During the first phase of the AU training interventions, 12 training sessions were conducted. Training modules were presented by several subject experts from across the continent:

1. Setting up a coordination team and workstreams to monitor COVID-19 in the workplace
2. Epidemiology and management of COVID-19 in the workspace
3. Return-to-work post-COVID-19 illness and lockdown
4. Impacts of COVID-19 on the workplace: OSH context
5. COVID-19 health risk assessment
6. Available control measures in workplaces related to COVID-19
7. Rational use of personal protective equipment (PPE) during COVID-19
8. Medical screening and testing for COVID-19 at different workplaces
9. Cleaning of hands and environment, including decontamination
10. What to do when an employee tests positive for COVID-19
11. Information management and utilisation including research
12. How can trade unions assist their members during the COVID-19 pandemic?

More than 900 individuals were trained from all over the globe, with the majority from Africa (Figure 1). Countries represented included Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Gambia, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. A number of participants were from outside Africa.

REFERENCE

1. Coronavirus – African Union Member States (55) reporting COVID-19 cases (976,208) deaths (21,050), and recoveries (651,455). Africanews. 2020 Aug 5. Available from: <https://www.africanews.com/2020/08/05/>

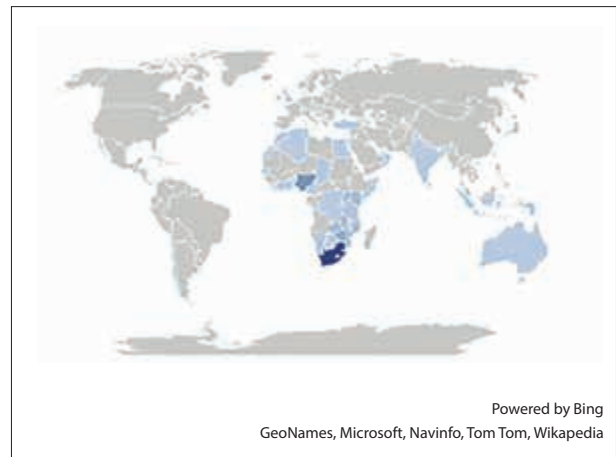


Figure 1. Heat map, indicating countries that participated in the training

CONCLUSION

AUDA-NEPAD and its partners recognise that COVID-19 might be here for some time and, hence, the AU Expert Group was established with a sustainability focus post-COVID-19. The sub-committees are continuing their work with the Training Committee and are planning for phase two. The Guideline Committee is developing two guidelines on the informal sector and infection prevention and control (IPC). The committee will focus on OSH technical guidelines and training post-COVID-19.

RESOURCES FOR UPDATES ON PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Website: <http://www.satbhss.org/>
 Twitter: https://twitter.com/SATBHSS_Project
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SATBHSS/>
 YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpfa6BVEg8WhTDIgyDLwfAg>

[coronavirus-african-union-member-states-55-reporting-covid-19-cases-976-208-deaths-21-050-and-recoveries-651-455/](https://www.africanews.com/2020/08/05/coronavirus-african-union-member-states-55-reporting-covid-19-cases-976-208-deaths-21-050-and-recoveries-651-455/) (accessed 5 Aug 2020).