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Towards a new West African Regional Disease Surveillance Network CORDS and WAHO sign Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

25 February Lyon France.

Connecting Organisations for Regional Disease Surveillance (CORDS) and the West African Health Organisation (WAHO) signed a MOU, on February 10, 2016 in Burkina Faso, to jointly support the formation of a new Regional Infectious Disease Surveillance Network in the “Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)” space.

The West African Health Organisation (WAHO) (www.wahooas.org) is a Specialized Institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with a mission and mandate to assure the protection of health of the peoples in the fifteen countries in the West African sub-region- Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo. The WAHO headquarters are based in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso.

WAHO serves ECOWAS in matters relating to health, innovation and research by coordinating joint projects as stated in ECOWAS/WAHO Charter (see <http://bit.ly/1Lbw2Uo>). Building on the lessons learnt from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, WAHO has initiated, with the recommendation of Ministries of Health of the fifteen ECOWAS countries a process of developing and establishing the ECOWAS Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control (ECOWAS-RCSDC) and the Network for Epidemiological Surveillance and Communicable Disease Control across the ECOWAS region. The regulations for establishing these structures under WAHO supervision were adopted by the Ministers of Health of ECOWAS countries (and subsequently endorsed by the Heads of States,) in their meeting in Dakar, Senegal in Nov 2015 ([http://www.wahooas.org/spip.php, article11269](http://www.wahooas.org/spip.php,article11269)).

“CORDS had the privilege of supporting WAHO in identifying National Coordination Institutions that could contribute to the creation of ECOWAS-RCSDC,” notes Dr Bakary Sidiki Sylla, Project Director at CORDS. “CORDS also worked as a partner with WAHO in contributing to the drafting of the Regulations establishing operating procedures of the RCSDC and Surveillance approaches across the ECOWAS region.”

CORDS organized a “Champions” Meeting, in Dakar in November 16-17, 2015, to discuss the concept of an Infectious Disease Network in the context of West Africa and its implementation. The meeting brought together CORDS Disease Surveillance Network coordinators from South (<http://www.sacids.org>) and East Africa (<http://bit.ly/1oAFPsL>) and beyond. They shared their practical networking experiences and worked together with WAHO representative to identify ways CORDS could most usefully support WAHO with its development planning and implementation challenges.

The new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) makes CORDS an official Partner of WAHO. CORDS has agreed to mobilise expertise from its already existing Networks in support of WAHO in a jointly defined development programme for the formation of a West African Network for Infectious Disease Surveillance (WANIDS). The network will include National Coordination Institutions in each of the 15 ECOWAS countries. The Network will be coordinated by the ECOWAS-RCSDC. CORDS will provide and help adapt relevant documentation which have been found to be effective tools in operationalising disease surveillance networks, joint resource mobilization, inter-country programme development within networks and promoting research and capacity building. Importantly the Two Institutions agreed that they will both represent their joint work in meetings as they promote and advocate their respective activities.

“We are very pleased with this new partnership with WAHO and see it as a major achievement and opportunity for CORDS,” notes Pr. Nigel Lightfoot, the Executive Director of CORDS. “ It acknowledges the importance and utility of our six existing Networks’ experience in developing, maintaining and innovating around their multi-country multi-sectorial ONE-HEALTH oriented action platforms and approaches. It also provides a unique opportunity for our Networks to actively and strategically support the creation of WANIDS by sharing their experience and resources. Importantly, it is a major step in helping CORDS address its mission of creating a healthier, safer, fairer and more secure *World United Against Infectious Diseases*.

The MoU was signed on behalf of WAHO by Dr Xavier Crespín, the General Director of WAHO and Pr. Nigel Lightfoot, the Executive Director of CORDS in the presence of Dr Carlos Brito, Director a.i. Department of Epidemic and Disease Control at WAHO and Dr Bakary Sidiki Sylla, Project Director at CORDS and other WAHO personnel (see pictures). Pr Ann Marie Kimball, Senior Consulting Fellow at Chatham House, Mrs Emma Orefuwa, Sabrina Salem and Kellie Creamer are acknowledged for their contribution.