

# TANZANIA FIELD AND LABORATORY EPIDEMIOLOGIST'S ASSOCIATION



## REPORT FOR COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST FIELD EPIDEMIOLOGY DAY IN THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA



**VENUE:** NYERERE SQUARE DODOMA

**DATE:** 7<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2021

## **Introduction**

The World Field Epidemiology Day was celebrated for the first time on September 7, 2021 to recognize and raise awareness of the vital role of field epidemiologists in protecting the health of populations. Such that, in so doing, advancing global health security, and to advocate for increased investment in the field epidemiology training, research, and professional development. The significance of this date goes back to 1854 when John Snow, the English physician considered to be the founder of modern epidemiology. The reasons being, he took the findings from his now-famous investigation in tracing the source of a cholera outbreak in Soho, London, to local officials, leading them to take action to control cholera outbreak in that locality.

In Tanzania, the commemoration of this important day took place at the heart of Dodoma City around Nyerere Square recreational area whereby, few members of the Tanzania Field and Laboratory Epidemiologist's Association (TANFLEA) from Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar graced this event as representatives of other members. On this day, representatives from WHO, FAO, CDC, Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children(MOHCDGEC), Ministry of livestock and Fishery (Pharmaceutical services, Epidemiology and diseases control Section, Health Education and Promotion Section, etc) also attended this important day.

The main objectives for commemorating the Field Epidemiology day were to;

- i. Raise awareness on the importance of field epidemiologists in protecting the health of populations and advancing national health security in the country,
- ii. Advocate for increased investment in the field epidemiology training, research, and professional development.

The theme for commemoration of this year's World Field Epidemiology day in Tanzania was *'Strengthening health surveillance systems for early detection of public health threats'*

## **How the commemoration was done (Methodology)**

The commemoration of the first World Field Epidemiology day in Tanzania was planned to be done by having pre-event activities such as media orientation and community awareness/sensitization. These were done before the climax day of 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2021. Media sensitization was done by inviting prominent journalists from various radio and television stations who were given a presentation on how this day was important to epidemiologist and laboratory experts. Community awareness creation and sensitization was done by members of TANFLEA going to radio and television stations to inform the general public on the role of epidemiologists and Laboratory experts on responding to public health threats in our country and beyond. Information was provided on services to be provided for free on the climax day.

Another set of outdoor activities were implemented on the climax day whereby the Minister for Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MOHCDGEC)- Hon. Dr. D. Gwajima (MP) was the guest of honour. Before she delivered her speech there were remarks from the President of TANFLEA

and representatives of the invited organizations/institutions. Outdoor activities such as COVID-19 health education and vaccination advocacy in various regions and onsite at Nyerere square in Dodoma City such as afya check (screening for blood pressure, HIV, blood sugar, BMI, etc) were effectively implemented.

## **Achievements/results**

### **1. Key issues emanated from speeches during commemoration of the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Epidemiology day**

#### **a) Guest of Honor – Minister MOHCDGEC**

The Minister for Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children – Dr. Dorothy Gwajima (MP) was the guest of honor for this event in Tanzania. In her speech, she stressed on the following issues:



Figure 1: Guest of Honor – Dr. D. Gwajima – Minister for Health

✓ Expressed her deep appreciation for being invited as a Guest of Honor during commemoration of the first World Field Epidemiology Day in Tanzania, the important day for ‘**diseases detectives**’ for communicable and non-communicable diseases around the World

✓ Commended Epidemiologists and Laboratory Experts across the country especially graduates of TFELTP who have been in front and influential for many years during response to various disease outbreaks which have been reported in our country and elsewhere.

✓ To table an idea of having the World Field Epidemiology day recognized by WHO through the World Health Assembly meeting next year

- ✓ The challenge of underutilization of data and other statistics for decision making especially at sub-national levels was realized, so she called upon full engagement of epidemiologists and trainees of intermediate and frontline courses offered by TFELTP to address this drawback.
- ✓ The need of multi-sectoral collaboration using a One Health approach during response to public health threats was also emphasized. She suggested that there be a forum at least once a year to discuss one health issues but also the use of the one health approach at all levels to address public health threats.
- ✓ Lack of recognition of Epidemiologists and laboratory experts in the scheme of service was realized. She therefore ordered all responsible Departments within MoH under the Director of Preventive Health Services (**Who was present**) to coordinate the matter and collaborate with other competent authorities in the Government systems including PORALG. Moreover, Honourable. Dr. Florence Samizi (**Member of Parliament for Muhambwe Constituency** in Kigoma) who was in attendance during the event as she is also an Epidemiologist and active member of TANFLEA was requested to spearhead the process when it goes into the parliament for various proceedings.

- ✓ Currently, there are 512 experts of epidemiology and laboratory management emanating from graduates of MSc program, intermediate and frontline courses under TFELTP. A total of 37 are expected to graduate from the MSc program in addition to the available 152 (29.68%) Epidemiologists and Laboratory experts. This is a good indication that workforce for diseases surveillance and outbreak response is gradually increasing in the country.
- ✓ Finally, she appreciated continuous support received from WHO, World Bank, and CDC to run the TFELTP program, she also commended MUHAS for working closely with the Ministry of Health on running the program since it started on 2008, with the first batch of MSc program.

**b). Director of Preventive Health Services – Dr. Leonard Subi**

- ✓ He commended good work done by epidemiologists and Laboratory experts in the country on curbing down the curve during response to disease outbreaks once they occur.
- ✓ Within the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children – Department of Preventive Health Services is the host of TFELTP program and most beneficiary of graduates from the MSc program, intermediate and frontline courses. Therefore, he joined forces to congratulate all Epidemiologists and Lab experts for commemorating the first World Field Epidemiology Day.
- ✓ Finally, he welcomed the Guest of Honor to offer her speech and address the audience.

**c). President of TANFLEA and representatives from the invited institutions/organizations**

President of TANFLEA – Dr. Elibariki Mwakapeje, on behalf of members, thanked the Guest of Honor for gracing the event but before he did any further dues, he asked the audience to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of member who have passed on. Representatives from WHO, CDC, Assistant Director for Epidemiology Section, Dr. Florence Samizi (Honorable Member of Parliament for Muhambwe Constituency in Kigoma), Director of Veterinary Services also delivered their short goodwill remarks.

## ii. Implemented activities

### a). Media orientation



Figure 2: Dr. E. Mwakapeje - President of TANFLEA, during Media Orientation in Dar es Salaam

On 4th September 2021, journalists were given orientation on the whole concept of epidemiology, TANFLEA and the reason why it was decided to commemorate the Field Epidemiology day globally. The workshop was done at NIMR Complex building in Dar es-Salaam whereby facilitators were few Epidemiologists who are residing in Dar es Salaam. The media houses which were represented in this orientation workshop were Upendo Media, TBC1, Sibuka, Mwananchi Newspaper, Azam TV, Channel Ten, and different bloggers, in total (n=20) journalists attended this orientation session.



Figure 3: Dr. A. Hussein. Member of TANFLEA's Publicity Committee, during Media orientation in Dar es Salaam

This orientation was key as it laid down a foundation to journalists for understanding the whole idea of the World Field Epidemiology day and therefore, they were able to comprehend the role of epidemiologists in the fight against public health threats. The event was a success as it helped increase the visibility of TANFLEA where different articles were written through various newspapers like the guardian and Mtanzania , various blogs also shared articles about TANFLEA activities, and we were also given some TV and Radio airtime.

## b). Community awareness and sensitization

In collaboration with the Health education and promotion section of the Ministry of Health, we were able to prepare a schedule for epidemiologists from various regions to attend present awareness creation session in various radio and television stations, and we had a common understanding of elaborating to the public the role of epidemiologists in the country and why commemoration of the world field epidemiology day was set to be held on 7th September 2021.



*Figure 4: Ambakisye and Neema as were captured during sensitization session to RRT on the role Epidemiologists and Lab Experts in Mwanza*

Short messages and one banners were also created and posted on various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and twitter for community sensitization. During sessions for community sensitization, we also advocated to the public on voluntary services which were planned to be offered for free during commemoration of this day such as blood donation, afya check and environmental sanitation activities.

The commemoration of the first World Field Epidemiology Day arrived at a time when some epidemiologists had been truly indispensable in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic including acceleration of the vaccines uptake, building strong public health surveillance and response systems to be able to cub any public health emergence efficiently and effectively.

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*Figure 5: Dr. Atuganile and Emmanuel during COVID-19 vaccination campaign at Joy FM in Kigoma Municipality*

With this special issue, we gathered some of the rapid response team members from Kigoma, Kagera, Mwanza, Geita, Shinyanga, and Mara. The participants were regional and district Health officers (RHOs & DHOs), Regional and District Pharmacists as well as Regional and District Laboratory Technologists. These are among the key actors on emergence response. These teams were oriented on the role that field and laboratory epidemiologist do to keep our community healthier through prompt detection and rapid response to events of public health importance.

Another team including four Epidemiologists were in Kigoma region, where they organized a COVID-19 vaccine campaign and advocacy outreach services in collaboration with the Regional and Council Health Management teams.

The Advocacy was in the following ways

- a) COVID - 19 Vaccination advocacy through Radio Joy (Most famous local radio in Kigoma region).

- b) COVID - 19 vaccination advocacy and exercise at Bangwe Prison in Kigoma Municipality. A total of (n=151) people were sensitized at Bagwe Prison, whereby (n=8, 5%) were Prison Officers. Among 95% of the sensitized prisoners, (n = 132, 92%) were Male and (n = 11, 8%) females. Out 151 sensitized, (n=51, 34%) responded and agreed to get vaccinated on that day. Amongst those vaccinated, (n= 46, 90%) were prisoners and (n=5, 11%) were prison officers with (n=3, 60%) being males.



Figure 6: TANFLEA members (in white T-shirts) supervising COVID-19 vaccination process at Bangwe Prison in Kigoma



Figure 7: Dr. Saumu Nungu and Emmanuel Mwakapasa - TANFLEA members (in white T-shirts) together with Prison Officers after COVID-19 advocacy session at Bangwe Prison in Kigoma during commemoration of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Epidemiology Day

### c). Afya check



Figure 8: Booth for afya check and blood donation during commemoration of the first World Epi day in Dodoma

This was treated as a community-based health promotion event which was conducted in the open space around Nyerere square grounds in Dodoma City on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021. It was a voluntary program, which lasted for a whole day. The main activities involved were COVID-19 awareness creation to the public using a public address system and medical screening at no cost. Screening activities undertaken were measuring BMI, blood pressure, blood glucose level, and anemia. The team of experts and clients for medical screening, fully adhered to the control and preventive measures of COVID-19 such as wearing face masks, hand hygiene through regular use of sanitizers and maintaining one meter apart between service providers and clients during screening. A total of 44 people had the Afya check with most of them being males (n=30, 68%) and the median age for participants was 38 years. All clients had the following tests done: Blood Pressure, n= 44, 100% (highest = 167/83 mmHg, lowest = 95/62 mmHg), Pulse rate, n= 44, 100% (highest =98, lowest = 87), random blood sugar test,

n=42, 95.4% (highest = 12.4mmol/L, lowest = 4.8mmol/L) and (n=35, 68%) tested their HIV status, all were none-reactive.

#### d). Blood donation

This activity was conducted in the open space around Nyerere square grounds in Dodoma City on 7th September 2021. It was a voluntary program, which lasted for a whole day. A total of 15 people donated blood, most of the blood donors were females (n=8, 53.3%), and majority of the blood donors (n=9, 60%) were first time donors.



Figure 9: Blood donation event during commemoration of the first World Epidemiology Day in Dodoma on 7th Sept 2021



Figure 10: Preparation for blood donation exercise

#### e). Environmental sanitation

The sanitation activity was done through environmental cleanliness in the surroundings of Dodoma Region Referral Hospital (RRH) on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Apart from raising community awareness regarding the role of field epidemiologists, environmental cleanliness was purposively planned as part of demonstration of key activities needed for the community to adopt.

This is based on health education provided on regular basis, such that sanitation can curb and prevent a significant number of communicable diseases. Since various outbreak investigations (especially for cholera 2015-2018) were done by field epidemiologists, most of the time they come up with recommendations to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene to be done by the community members. TANFLEA members, a journalist and hospital staff including the patron and medical officer in charge (MOI) participated in the activity.

Environmental cleanliness involved sweeping, raking fallen leaves, grass cutting, cleaning surface water drainage channels and solid waste collection and disposal. The event was aired by Daima TV (*Yu-Tube channel*) and published on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2021 in the Majira Newspaper



*Figure 11: TANFLEA members and Dodoma Regional Referral Hospital staff during the Sanitation event in the surroundings of Dodoma regional referral Hospital*

### **iii. Way forward**

- ✓ Regular follow-up to the Director of Preventive Health Services (DPS) at MoHCDGEC on progress made regarding recognition of Epidemiologists and Laboratory experts in the scheme of Services
- ✓ Prepare a letter of appreciation to the World Health Organization for their financial support for commemoration of the first World Field Epidemiology day in Tanzania
- ✓ Make follow-up with the DPS at MoHCDGEC on ensuring that commemoration of the World Epidemiology Day is recognized by the World Health Organization, as this will widen chance of getting financial support for this event

### **v. Acknowledgement**

TANFLEA, would like to extend sincere appreciation to the World Health Organization for their financial support, which made commemoration of the first World Field Epidemiology day in Tanzania a reality. Activities implemented under this support are indicated in the table of expenditure above. Active TANFLEA members, are also acknowledged for their regular contributions which complimented important activities for commemoration of this important professional event, as indicated in the table above. All Epidemiologists and Laboratory experts are encouraged to settle their outstanding debts and continue to support the association for a better tomorrow of our cadre and serve the general public as professionals.