Official INASA Opening Promises Healthier Future in Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau celebrated the official opening of its new national public health institute, INASA, in February, marking the country’s remarkable journey to rebuild its war-torn public health system. The event attracted a crowd of well-wishers representing Guinea-Bissau’s prime minister, government ministries, and development partners and collaborators from other African countries; WHO; and the governments of Brazil, Portugal, Spain, China, Angola, Cape Verde, Iceland, and Denmark.

Scientific seminars, tours, partner recognition, and a keynote speech by INASA President Amabelia Rodrigues highlighted the inaugural event at the new headquarters building, which houses the INASA administrative staff as well as state-of-the-art meeting and training space available nowhere else in the bomb-damaged capital city of Bissau.

The new institute links and unites the formerly fragmented components of Guinea-Bissau’s national public health system and is already promoting evidence-based decision making that is improving lives in Guinea-Bissau. With its own and leveraged funds from IANPHI and other partners, and guidance from colleagues from Brazil and Portugal, Guinea-Bissau has rebuilt its lab and galvanized disease monitoring and reporting. The national school of public health is now part of INASA and is training public health staff, nurses, midwives, and lab technicians to replace those who fled during the war. A surveillance program equipped with laptops and cell phones has reduced response time to outbreaks from weeks to days.

Born from a vision by Guinea-Bissau’s Secretary General for Health Augusto-Paulo Silva more than 15 years ago, the project to create the new institute was ultimately started with IANPHI seed funding in 2009. Since then, every day brings more partners and more progress toward development of a fully functional NPHI. Read more.

NPHIs in Action: Triple-Threat Public Health Crisis in Japan

IANPHI extends concern and condolences to the Japanese people and our colleagues at the Japan National Institute of Public Health as they deal with the aftermath of a 9.0 earthquake, a devastating tsunami, and a developing nuclear threat. Many of IANPHI’s member institutes have stepped up to help avert the growing public health crisis. See links to ongoing efforts of the NIPH and many relief organizations. More
Bangladesh Long-Term Surveillance Project Funded
IANPHI has approved a three-year grant of more than $500,000 USD to the Bangladesh Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) to strengthen disease surveillance, reporting of disease trends, and outbreak response. First-year funds also will be directed to gathering data about non-communicable diseases, and developing a national public health laboratory strategic plan. Read more.

New Short Term and Seed Grants Will Lead to More Informed Health Policies
IANPHI has awarded eight new grants totaling more than $300,000 to seven member countries, funding projects that range from improving perinatal care in Nigeria and controlling arboviruses in Uganda to strengthening Serbia’s ability to respond to public health emergencies. The latest round of grants will assist IANPHI member institutes at different stages of NPHI development—from creating the plans for a new public health institute in El Salvador to learning advanced research techniques to better understand and prevent Chagas disease in Mexico.

In Vietnam, a grant will support the study of H. pylori in order to better diagnose and treat patients with gastric cancer, and in Cote d’Ivoire faculty will be trained on research principles for HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. Uganda is focusing on getting research into policy and will also study targeted vector control strategies to prevent arbovirus infections.

This 2011 round of awards included three, two-year seed grants (up to $60,000 USD each) to young researchers and five short-term ($25,000 USD each) capacity building awards. Read more about the new grants.

Reducing NCDs in Nigerian Slums
To fortify themselves against the early morning cold and wind, the fishermen in the Makoko slum drink a strong home brew similar to gin for breakfast, and then set off in their boats across the trash-filled lagoon to the Atlantic. In those same waters, the some 10,000 residents of this crowded slum in Lagos, Nigeria, bathe, urinate, wash their clothes, and get their drinking water.

In all her years in Lagos, Adesola Musa had never seen such poverty. “Most children don’t go to school, there’s high unemployment, no health facilities, teen pregnancy and crime are high—especially rape,” she says. In addition to the infectious diseases rampant in Makoko, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)—liver disease, hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular and lung diseases, cancer, mental health problems, and allergies—pose increasingly large public health challenges. Lifestyle factors contributing to many of these chronic conditions include tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse, diet, indoor pollution, obesity, and lack of exercise.

As the lead statistician for the Nigerian Institute for Medical Research, Musa helped design a study for data collection in Makoko and two other Nigerian slums, looking closely at lifestyle and the prevalence of NCDs. Results of the study of 2,400 slum dwellers will give policy makers reliable baseline knowledge to make informed health policy aimed at reducing chronic disease in Lagos by promoting healthy lifestyles. A $56,000 research grant from IANPHI funds the study. Read more.

Since 2006, IANPHI has awarded more than 44 grants to 28 countries.
Mentorship Program Adds New Mentor-Mentee Pair and Adviser

We welcome two new participants to the IANPHI Mentorship Program. Jean-Claude Desenclos, scientific director of the French Institute of Public Health Surveillance (InVS), will mentor Abiba Banla, director of Togo’s National Institute of Hygiene (INH), as she leads her nation’s efforts to create a new NPHI. The pair will be preparing a plan for a productive collaboration that will benefit both partners as well as the development of the new institute in Francophone Africa. Read more about mentor-mentee pairs.

Omar Khan, director of global health and assistant professor of family medicine at the University of Vermont, has agreed to expand his mentorship role and serve as a resource to the other mentors to develop and strengthen the IANPHI mentorship program. In his new role, he will help IANPHI take mentorship to the next level by improving linkages among program participants, advocating for a culture of mentorship within IANPHI member institutes, and creating institutional change through development of key individuals and enterprise-wide initiatives. We all expect to benefit greatly from his insights and expertise.

New Organization Seeks to Build Sustainable Laboratory Capacity on African Continent

The African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM) was launched in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in March. Participants from 36 countries attended the three-day meeting, including officials from ministries of health and leading organizations and associations in laboratory system strengthening from Africa and around the world. ASLM envisions all African nations providing affordable access to quality laboratory services, making possible effective treatment and prevention of disease and a better life for everyone. ASLM will serve as a professional body to guide laboratory network development and strengthening efforts in Africa, guide the process of certification of laboratory medicine training, and work with WHO-AFRO and other partners to develop and implement laboratory policies and guidelines in the African region. About 70% of all physician decisions are based on laboratory results. Accreditation is critical for ensuring the quality of laboratory results and for fostering improvement in other sectors of the health care system. Read about ASLM and its new journal.

Member Update

Mohammed Hassar, director of the Pasteur Institute of Morocco, is encouraging NPHIs to develop diagnostic capacities for rabies using tools for molecular biology. Click here to view a rabies presentation he made earlier this year to the AfroREB network in Maputo, Mozambique, and for another presentation with Terence Taylor, president of the International Council of Life Sciences, on Biological Safety and Security: A regional Networking Approach, presented in Bangkok to the International Federation of Biosafety Associations.

Although strengthening health-care systems is receiving increased attention, strengthening public health systems and institutions could save more lives at lower cost, CDC Director Thomas Frieden and IANPHI President Jeffrey Koplan wrote recently in Lancet. Read Stronger National Public Health Institutes for Global Health
**Enver Roshi** is the new director of the National Institute of Public Health in Tirana, Albania.

**A. N. van der Zande** is the new director general of the Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM).

IANPHI’s efforts to link and strengthen national public health institutes are highlighted in two recent articles. *Discover* magazine (*Can Bill Gates Buy a Better World?*) notes Nigeria’s success in attaining low-cost drugs to treat MDR-TB, and *Emory Health* magazine (*CDCs for the World*) focuses on two IANPHI members’ successes: how Bangladesh traced outbreaks of Nipah virus to bat-contaminated date palm juice and how Guinea-Bissau has re-invented its public health system through INASA.

**Upcoming**

**Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Looking for Innovative Solutions**

The Gates Foundation is now accepting grant proposals for Round 7 of Grand Challenges Explorations, an initiative to encourage innovative and unconventional global health solutions. Applicants can be at any experience level; in any discipline; and from any organization, including colleges and universities, government laboratories, research institutions, non-profit organizations and for profit companies. Grant proposals are being accepted online until May 19, 2011. Initial grants will be US $100,000 each, and projects showing promise will have the opportunity to receive additional funding of up to US $1 million. Full descriptions of the new topics and application instructions are available at: [www.grandchallenges.org/gce](http://www.grandchallenges.org/gce)

**EU NPHIs to Meet in Poland**

European NPHI directors will meet in Poznan, Poland, November 5–6, 2011, prior to the Ministerial Conference on the Polish EU Presidency. More information will be available soon on the IANPHI website.

Read about more upcoming events on the [IANPHI website](http://www.ianphi.org).