

REPORT OF AFRICA GALA NIGHT 2018

Introduction

The Africa Gala Night program was initiated in line with African customary practice of “end of year stock-taking and thanksgiving”. End of year stock-taking or evaluation of actions and decisions, not just by individuals, but as a society, is an age-long tradition in the African culture: birthing the idea of agenda-setting for the incoming year. That is, besides the appraisal, it is usually an opportunity to set community development goals for the incoming year and prioritize obligations. It is in this light, that the maiden edition of Africa Gala Night program was conceived.

The goal of the event is to build a network of Africans in diaspora for engagement on Africa development issues. The main objective is to galvanize African scholars, African community in Thüringia and Germany; not only to celebrate culture, diversity and social cohesion, but to interact and share opinion on a common subject of significant value to Africa’s development. E.g. deepening democracy, addressing Africa emigration problem, human rights, achieving sustainable development goals, addressing vaccine hesitancy, etc. The expected outcome is increased community of multipliers, inspired by Africans in diaspora in partnership with host community.

While celebrating and merry over our accomplishments, strides and successful end of year, we also, as Africans in diaspora must see a need to discuss how to contribute to development challenges Africa faces. If Africans in diaspora can be the single largest external source of revenue to the continent behind direct foreign investment and ahead of “over-exaggerated” foreign aid, then, it is a worthy strategy to equally enlist the diaspora Africans on specific Africa development agenda.

AFRICA GALA NIGHT 2018 PROGRAM

The maiden edition of Africa Gala Night took place at the Victor’s Residenz-Hotel Erfurt – Häßlerstraße 17, 99086, Erfurt: on December 29, 2018. The program began at 17:00 and went on until 21:30; followed by an after party until 00:00. The anticipated attendance was 70 persons; however, the event witnessed a bigger than initially expected turnout. A total of 126 participants (without accompanying minors) graces the event. However, due to EU data protection and consent laws, 86 participants agreed and sign to the attendance sheet (appendix 1); for their data to be used for this report. The attendee’s affiliation cut across different spectrum of endeavours, including: Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, FS Wiso Erfurt, University of Erfurt, Bauhaus University Weimer, EAH Jena, RCCG Leipzig, Glück e.V., Netzwerk Gemeinde Erfurt, Rechtsanwalt, IBM, BA English, Technical University Ilmenau, Christian Albrecht Universität Zükiel, Caritasverband für das Bistum e.V., Spirit of Football e.V., Springboard to Learning e.V, TANG e.V., ANSOLE e.V, Friedrich Schiller Universität Jena, Culture Goes Europe (CGE) e.V., Psychology and Infectious Disease Lab and Forschungsgruppe für Gesundheit und Gesellschaft, etc.

The objectives of the 2018 Africa Gala Night were:

- **Podium Discussion:** To interact on challenges of vaccine acceptance in Africa and role of Africans in diaspora via a Podium discussion
- **Presentation of Awards:** Presentation of appreciation awards to individuals, organisations and families contributing to the growth of Africa and/or Africans

- **Dinner Party:** Compilation of different foods and a party

It was organized by *Africa Partners Initiative* in collaboration with *Afrikanisch-Deutscher Verein für Kultur und Bildung e.V.* (ADKV).

Welcoming - The 2018 program started with a welcome address by the lead organizer: Collins G. Adeyanju. He took the audience through the spirit behind Africa Gala Night idea; the contribution of Africans in diaspora to their host community and their potentials; and finally, what they can do to support the continent based on the influence they wield on families, communities, decision makers and development initiatives back home. “We must be part of the success story of our continent”. He heartily welcomed the guests and appreciate them for honouring the invitation. He reiterated the significant value of partnership by the guests in all areas of Africa development process. He thanked those who have been supporting in one way or another: projects, scholars, families and cultural exchanges in Africa, as well as African immigrants here in Thüringen. He concluded with objectives of the evening, as highlighted above and gratitude to sponsors who made it happen.



Welcome address by Collins G. Adeyanju

Opening - The opening address was delivered by Mr. Agboola Oni-Orison (Leipzig). He spoke about the contribution of African community to Germany’s development and the opportunities Germany has blessed the community with. He encouraged the audience not to take the opportunity for granted, but to strive to achieve the best in life. At the same time, remember the duty on all to be concern about the progress of the African continent. He emphasised on dignity and place of love to the host community and also extend same back to disadvantaged families back home. The development of the continent must not be left to the existing failed system back in Africa, that’s why the discussion today must be viewed from diaspora contribution to development back in Africa.



Opening address by Mr. Oni-Orisan

Podium Discussion

The opening address was followed by the podium discussion on the topic: The challenges of Vaccine Acceptance in Africa and the role of Africans in diaspora. The panellist consists of Prof. Dr. Daniel Egbe¹, Dorothee Heinemerier², Collins Adeyanju³, Agboola Oni-Orisan⁴ and eventually Dr. Amani Bohoussou⁵. The discussion touched on questions/topics such as:

- The importance/benefits of vaccination/immunization to self and society
- Why vaccination Hesitancy despite its significance to preventing diseases and deaths (globally)

¹ Prof.Dr. Daniel A.M. Egbe is a renowned researcher and lecturer at the Johannes Kepler University Linz and Jena. He was an independent evaluator for the World Bank Group and Association of African Universities; and coordinator of ANSOLE e.V.

² Dorothee Heinemeier is doctoral candidate at the Psychology and Infectious Disease Lab and CEREB at the university of Erfurt. She is a specialist in health decision making and evidence-based health communication and her PhD dissertation project focuses on vaccine hesitancy and non-acceptance in health campaigns.

³ Collins Adeyanju is a doctoral candidate at the Psychology and Infectious Disease Lab and CEREB at the university of Erfurt. He is a lecturer of Global Public Health and Systematic Review Methods.

⁴ Mr. Agboola Oni-Orisan has engineering and Finance academic training, but since 1991, been a facilitator of seminars and international conferences on Africa development issues.

⁵ Dr. Amani Bohoussou is an African linguist, communicator, teacher and leadership mentor.

- **Follow-up**
 - Are there main reasons for non-acceptance of vaccination?
 - How significant or not is hesitancy in Germany?
 - Are there differences to what is obtained elsewhere (e.g. Africa)?
- Since Out-Of-Pocket healthcare Cost (OOPs) is one of the contributors to poverty according to World Bank, do we think vaccination can have drastic effect on health expenditure and why?
- How can effective health communication through Africans in diaspora help address the above stated hesitancy issues?
 - **Follow-up:** According to WHO “**30 million children** are unimmunized because families are uninformed or misinformed about importance of immunization”
- How can we (Africans in Diaspora) become part of the solution?

The discussion was moderated by Collins Adeyanju and lasted for 85 minutes. Forty-five minutes were spent laying the foundation and providing the empirical/evidence-based narratives; thereafter the audience joined the conversation for another 40 minutes. All of the above topics were covered. Converging opinion was that, Africans in diaspora should energise the health communication or vaccination acceptance narrative into an agenda to be promoted; as equal in substance as the economic livelihood promotion.



Panellists during the podium discussion...moderated by Collins G. Adeyanju

The discussion enhanced interaction and engaged academic studies and the society; thereby inspiring a feedback forum on how best to engage and communicate vaccine acceptance to the African population. The first and most important barrier to be surmounted is the conspiracy theory behind vaccination as a fertility inducing mechanism to de-populate the Africans. The general view was that, this occupies the strongest determinant of vaccine hesitancy in Sub-Sahara Africa. While many still hold some of these strong negative stereotypical views concerning vaccination, there is little or insufficient counter-arguments communication, at least that is yet to be effective. Although evidence-based studies have debunked these conspiratorial linkages, effective communication via trusted medium has been relatively poor or absent. Prof. Egbe and other contributors questioned the role of

churches in Nigeria, Ghana and other countries in the region. Arguing that, the role of churches has been self-serving, rather than being a source or platform for promoting general wellbeing of the African people. I.e. they could have been one of the trusted vehicles for championing acceptance of vaccination and help fight vaccine preventable diseases.

Another barrier mentioned was education. According to Prof. Egbe and affirmed by practical testimonies from Dr. Bohoussou and other participants, the level of education of the population and the acceptance via-a-vis non-acceptance have relationship. Therefore, addressing the literacy level within the African society will increase the likelihood and understanding or comprehension of the role of vaccine: hence, engender its acceptance as the most effective medium for confronting the alarming rate of child and maternal mortality in the region. However, some participants felt that while formal education is the bedrock of any well-informed society, a lot is required to get there, and diaspora short- and medium-term goal should not be broad formal education of the populace, rather, appropriate information communication or knowledge sharing for immediate life-changing decision making on vaccination. Diaspora do not have the resources to educate the continent, hence, what can be done is to build on vaccination success stories and share the knowledge, since they (Africans in diaspora) also share resources or successes with relatives back home. The idea is to begin an enlightenment campaigns among relatives, networks, community leaders, policy decision-makers back in Africa. By so doing, the seed of trust may be established in the efficacy of vaccine, as the most veritable tool for addressing not just poverty (due to Out-Of-Pocket expenses on healthcare) but decrease avoidable and preventable deaths or disability.

Ms Heinemeier introduced confidence factor as an evidence-based psychological determinant of either motivation for accepting vaccine or refusal to continue. She emphasised that, once the attitude towards vaccination messages and the messengers is built on mistrust or miscommunication, the problem of hesitancy is not unexpected. This, she stressed, makes herd immunity almost hard to accomplish in societies. Others also contributed, along same line of thought and concluded that, because Africans in diaspora have high level of credibility than policy makers or politicians back in Africa, they stand a good chance to drive vaccine acceptance narratives on the continent. She also introduced the idea of legal framework around behaviour that promotes acceptance.



Ms. Heinemeier

Since out of pocket healthcare expenses (OOPs) is so critical, it dominated the latter phase of the podium discussion. According to World Bank, OOPs is one of the highest contributors to poverty on the continent. That is, by implication, greater proportion of money sent home by diaspora Africans is expended on healthcare. The speakers agreed that it is unacceptable, and something urgently needs to be done about it. Collins Adeyanju narrated the loss of his brother owing to polio, however, not killed by polio, but inability to cope with associated cost of caring for a polio-disabled brother led to his death. This topic solidifies all the questions and discussion for the night, hence, puts the audience in the state of what do we do now?

Finally, without infrastructure that enables vaccine to reach hinterland or innermost part of the communities, effective communication no matter how best, is a non-starter. It will not solve the problem, and herd immunity Ms Heinemeier talked about will be a mirage. Therefore, lag in coverage due to infrastructure gap must be loudly advocated for, in order for vaccine preventable diseases to be tackled with all seriousness. Eric Mushimiyimana concluded the session with a call for African scholars, experts and high skilled Africans to think about returning home to participate in the development process.



Cross section of Participants during the discussion

Outcomes of the podium discussion were:

Knowledge of Africans in diaspora was expanded on vaccine challenges in Africa; There was a general consensus of the value of vaccine acceptance as the best shot to fight high rate of maternal and child mortality in Africa; Religious and cultural doctrines that either prohibit or do not contribute-enough to the spread of the significance of vaccine acceptance as the most effective tool to fight vaccine-preventable-diseases was challenged and the narrative continues; The unanimous resolution to be champions/ambassadors of vaccine acceptance to the people; The need for unity in communicating the importance of vaccine acceptance, beginning with families, through communities and to policy makers in Africa; The possibility of forming a research/working group by Africans in diaspora on vaccine acceptance promotion; The need to invite African policy makers in subsequent forum; To campaign for improved quality of education and information communication, especially negatively framed ones on consequences of vaccine hesitancy; The need to involve the religious organizations in information communication on vaccination, in view of their enormous ability to instill confidence among citizens; Africans in diaspora to consider piloting a health communication promotion strategy/intervention in a community in Africa; since we have partners at the

program willing to support such project. Finally, scholars and experts of African origin in diaspora to considers returning home to contribute their gained knowledge to progress of the continent.

Dinner

Guests are introduced to exquisite varieties of African and intercontinental dishes. Although mainly African dishes, but because of the diversity of guests, varieties were incorporated to give them choices and also a semblance of Afrika-Deutsche or Africa-European convergence.



Award Ceremony

The final phase of the program was the award ceremony. Presentation of Africa Recognition Award 2018 was handed to individuals and organisations contributing to the growth of Africa's ideals and development; integration and promoting social good. Also, recognising individuals or organizations carrying out projects in Africa. Lastly, recognising individuals or organizations whose work is having positive impacts on the general society. The awardees were: Spirit of Football e.V., Caritasverband für das Bistum Erfurt e.V., Erde Der Kinder e.V., Dr. Kathleen Wachowski of Glück e.V., Paca Jose Manuel - Ausländerbeirat, Frau Petra Eweleit – co-founder and former coordinator of Fremde Werden Freunde e.V., Pastor Michael Sia of I AM Mission e.V., Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst e.V. (DAAD) e.V., Frau Elizabeth Strübel Founder of Springboard to Learning, and Prof. Dr. Daniel Egbe – coordinator of ANSOLE e.V.



Way Forward/Lessons Leant

- There is a general consensus that, the Africa Night should be sustained; possibly an annual event.
- There is a need to plan and fund-raise for the next Africa Night event, much in advance.
- There is a need to network with other African groups in German to enhance reach and collectivism.
- Consult widely on interest of African scholars on vaccine communication working group
- There is a need to hire two paid interns (funded from the program budget)

Vote of Thanks

The program concluded with a vote of thanks from Michael Sia on behalf of the organizers of the Africa Gala Night 2018. The night ended with dance to African music and tunes.



Credit to Team: Muiyiwa Alalade, Mufutau K. Muiyiwa, Dr. Olivia Ugokwe, Estella Nelson, Kemi Best Ovie, Jean de Dieu Kizito Cirhigiri, Gbolade Willoughby, Collins G. Adeyanju, Michael Sia, Osamede Peace Smith, Grigori Grigoriev, Best Ovie, Nicholas Abamu (photographer), Maria V. Colaemma and Elvira Sia.

Our Sponsors:

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