



The Corona Virus Disease Pandemic: Uganda Holds the First Public Dialogue on COVID-19 as a Preparedness Measure

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Figure 1: Left to right; Prof. Rhoda Wanyenze, Dean MakSPH, Dr. Elizabeth Ekirapa, MakSPH, Dr. Simon Antara, Country Director AFENET, Dr. Lisa Nelson, US CDC Director, Dr. Allan Muruta, Commissioner PHE, MoH, Dr. Yonas Tegegn Woldemariam, WHO Representative, Ug

Corona Virus Disease (COVID 19) is a new viral disease caused by SARS COV-2. The median incubation period is 4-6 days (range 2-14 days). It is transmitted through respiratory droplets in air or close contact and presents with fever, cough, fatigue, headache or flu like symptoms similar to seasonal influenza among others. COVID-19 affects all ages, mostly severe in old age or among cases with underlying conditions. Eight percent of cases are usually mild, 15% are severe, and 5% are critical. Most people recover spontaneously with supportive care. As of 13th March 2019, 125,048 confirmed (6,729 new) cases; 4,613 (321 new) deaths due to COVID-19 were reported globally, with China contributing the bulk of the numbers.



On 31st December 2019, China notified the WHO that it had observed cases of unusual respiratory disease. On 1st January 2020, using epidemiological data and after noticing human to human transmission, WHO declared the outbreak and on 30th January after spreading into other countries, COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Event of International Concern. On 11th March, it was declared a pandemic having spread to 146 countries and territories on six continents.

Therefore as part of the preparedness efforts, Uganda held a public dialogue on COVID-19 at Imperial Royale Hotel Kampala on 13th March 2020. This public dialogue was organized by Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH) in collaboration with Ministry of Health, Uganda, WHO Uganda, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET). The theme for this public dialogue was “Country Preparedness to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Epidemic”.

This dialogue targeted hoteliers, religious leaders, business community, immigration officers, and the general public. The objective of this public dialogue was to contribute to COVID-19 preparedness in Uganda through providing a platform to increase awareness of the general public on COVID-19, and educating the general public on the strategies the country is implementing to prevent, quickly detect, and appropriately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The dialogue provided opportunity for educating the public on infection prevention measures they should undertake to prevent themselves and others from getting infected with COVID-19 including clarifying myths and misconceptions, generating potential insights and gathering support from the general public and key stakeholders to strengthen national preparedness efforts to the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda. The public accessed the dialogue by attending in person at the hotel or via an online platform for those that could not make it to the hotel physically.

The key Speakers at this dialogue included; Prof. Rhoda Wanyenze, Dean, MakSPH, Dr. Lisa Nelson, Country Director CDC, Dr. Yonas Tegegn Woldemariam, WHO Country Representative, Dr. Henry Mwebesa, Director General Health Services, MoH who represented



the Minister of Health, Dr. Allan Muruta, Commissioner PHE, Mr. Atek Kagirita, Incident Manager COVID-19, Dr. Elizabeth Ekirapa, Program Director FETP, MakSPH, Mr. Kenneth Bainomugisha, Station Manager Airport Services, and Dr. Simon Antara, Country Director, AFENET.

The public dialogue was a success with an estimated 370 people attending in person and about 70 via online. Participants that attended included representatives from WHO, CDC, AFENET, different Ministries (Uganda), policy makers, academia, business community such as Kampala City Traders' Association (KACITA), religious leaders from different sects, Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) Uganda, Makerere University Walter Reed Project (MUWRP), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) among others. Most questions asked by the general public fell under three main categories; need more knowledge /information about COVID-19 key facts, transmission and preventive measures, need to know more about surveillance and preparedness plans being undertaken by the government and need for research and support for innovations about COVID-19 in Uganda.

The public dialogue was concluded by urging the public to practice infection prevention measures, avoid mass gatherings, assurance that continued efforts to engage all key stakeholders in the preparedness process were ongoing and encouragement that each person had a role to play in preparedness efforts to protect the country from COVID-19.