

Strengthening gender equality and social inclusion

in anti-microbial resistance intervention and implementation research

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REACT AFRICA AND SOUTH CENTRE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023:

Promoting gender equality in AMR research to tackle antimicrobial resistance

Introduction

Members of the antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and gender resource project team facilitated a breakout session at the ReAct Africa and South Centre Annual conference on 14-16 August 2023 in Lusaka, Zambia.

This year's conference was themed 'Leave

No One Behind: Advancing One Health AMR National Action Plans Implementation

in Africa'. The sole event to focus on gender and equity considerations helped attendants to identify how gender norms and inequalities might be hampering their

AMR work and to begin thinking about potential solutions.

Prioritizing local solutions

Over three days and multiple presentations, local solutions based on local research emerged as a priority for the African AMR agenda. Addressing AMR's spread and impact requires understanding underlying social, structural and systemic factors, which differ by place. In low- and middle-income settings, particularly in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, limited education, inappropriate prescription practices, ineffective drug regulation, and use of antimicrobials in animals contribute to AMR. 'Irrational' antibiotic use – storing or sharing unfinished medication, for instance – might be a response to structural challenges like limited access to healthcare and economic vulnerability.

Despite the contextual nature of these challenges, to date, most AMR research applied in LMIC countries originates from high-income countries. The conference allowed presenters to share insights from research conducted in and for local contexts. However, for many scientists and veterinarians, whose research focused on local, biomedical solutions to AMR, the breakaway session was their first exposure to gender and equity as it relates to AMR.

The relevance of gender and equity

Chaired by Erica Westwood, an implementation research advisor at ICARS, the gender and equity session was designed to be interactive and reflective, and to encourage engagement around topics that were new for many participants. The first presenter, Mirfin Mpundu, the director of [ReAct Africa](#) and the Africa regional lead for the International Centre for Antimicrobial Solutions ([ICARS](#)), shared research highlighting the gendered impact of AMR.

Evidence shows that, within societies, women and other marginalised groups generally face greater AMR exposure – due to norms around education, decision-making power within households, caregiving responsibilities, etc. However, in some contexts, gender may also put men at risk. For instance, if men are expected to be strong and self-reliant, they may avoid being seen at healthcare facilities or might purchase antibiotics from informal providers.

Gender and other social factors – like other drivers of AMR – are highly setting dependent. The presenters emphasised that AMR solutions require approaches informed by how gender inequalities manifest and impact AMR in particular settings.

*Dr Mirfin Mpundu
unpacking
research on the
gendered impact
of AMR.*



Gender and equity session moderator

Erica Westwood introduces the small group discussion.



Practical resources for AMR researchers

Despite the growing evidence for the importance of gender in AMR, for many researchers, how to apply a gender and equity lens is not always clear.

In 2022/2023, [a group of scientists and social scientists](#) created a practical resource for researchers wishing to incorporate gender and equity considerations in their research: "Practical Pathways to Integrating Gender and Equity Considerations in Antimicrobial Resistance Research". The [HSRC](#)'s Lorenza Fluks and [MORU](#)'s Bhensri Naemiratch introduced the Pathways document, explaining how they and their colleagues designed and structured it. They focused on the gender and equity matrix, a tool which researchers can use to conduct gender analyses when conceptualising their research project. The session participants reacted positively to the straightforward, step-by-step, practical content.

Subsequently, the event broke into a 'World Café'-style activity, aiming to create a relaxed atmosphere where everyone could contribute. In two smaller groups, participants delved into gender equity in the workplace, the influence of gender norms on AMR in agriculture, and how to design an inclusive and bias-free research process, among other topics. Insights from the event will contribute to the United Nations General Assembly 2024 High-level Meeting on AMR.