

Southern and East African Network for TB Control (SEARN-TB)



Participants of the first meeting of SEARN-TB in May 2023



Prof. Afeework Kassu, Director General, AHRI



Left to right Dr. Vanessa Veronese (scientist WHO-TDR), Dr. Corrine Merle (scientist WHO-TDR), Dr. Alemseged Abdissa, Delegate from the Swedish Embassy, and Dr. Abera (FMOH)

SOUTHERN AND EAST AFRICAN NETWORK FOR TB CONTROL (SEARN-TB) ESTABLISHED IN ADDIS ABABA

On May 10-12, 2023, With technical and financial support from the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) representatives from 18 of the 22 National TB programs of the Southern and East African region, as well as colleagues from WHO regional offices for Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean, partners such as The Union and Damien Foundation, and representatives of the Executive Secretariat of WARN/CARN-TB convened at the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to establish a new regional network for TB control among Southern and East African National TB Programs (NTPs), known as SEARN-TB network.

The meeting provided an opportunity to officially launch the network and set the

foundations. Over the course of the three-day meeting, network members established the Terms of Reference (ToR) for SEARN-TB, identified key priority areas and activities that could be addressed through the network, and defined the responsibilities and requirements of members. Representatives from NTPs presented the TB epidemiological context, challenges, and priorities for national TB responses. Several issues emerged as common challenges faced by multiple countries further justifying the need for the network.

Members endorsed the Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI) as the secretariat of SEARN-TB and the NTPs of Ethiopia and Malawi were elected to co-chair the secretariat for two years.

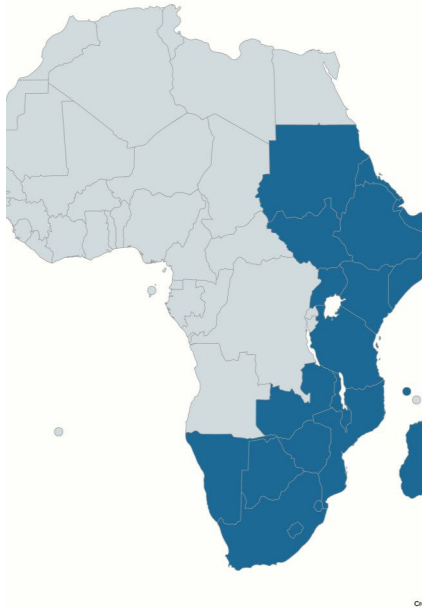
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Left to right: Dr. Alemseged Abdissa, Deputy Director General, AHRI, and Executive Secretary, SEARN-TB; Tsungane Mwenyenkulu, SEARN-TB co-chair and representative NTLEP, Malawi; Dr. Fasil Tsegaye, SEARN-TB co-chair and representative of NTP Ethiopia and Prof Dissou Affolabi, Executive Secretary, WARN/CARN-TB

THE SEARN-TB NETWORK



The overall goal of the SEARN-TB network is to act as a *platform for enhanced collaboration and communication between the 22 National TB programs of Southern and East African countries.*

The network will ensure that Implementation barriers to the delivery of country-level and sub-regional-level plans to address TB are identified, resolved, and/or brought to the attention of the relevant authorities and partners.

The SEARN-TB network has four key objectives:

1. To facilitate communication between NTPs, and between NTPs and key partners and stakeholders in the region
2. To promote and facilitate implementation and operational research for enhanced TB control
3. To promote harmonization across of strategies and best practices for TB control the region.
4. To support NTPs with advocacy and resource mobilization efforts that can strengthen national responses to TB

“SEARN-TB is an African network that creates a platform for NTPs to learn from each other and inspire each other to control tuberculosis in the region” Dr. Alemseged

MEET THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR SEARN-TB SECRETARIAT

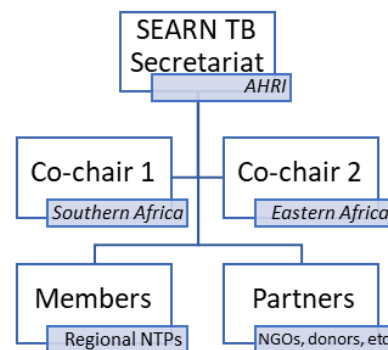


DR. ALEMSEGED ABDISSA

Dr. Alemseged Abdissa is currently serving the SEARN-TB secretariat as executive-secretariat. He is also the deputy director general for the Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI) since September 2018. Previously he led the department of microbiology as associate professor and directed clinical and nutrition research center at Jimma university.

THE SEARN-TB EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

The Executive Secretariat will provide overall coordination and day-to-day management of the network and will serve as the focal point of the network.



The Executive Secretariat is responsible for :

- ◇ Promote communication and engagement among members, together with the co-chairs by providing opportunities for members to communicate with one

another (e.g., newsletters, WhatsApp groups, emails, etc)

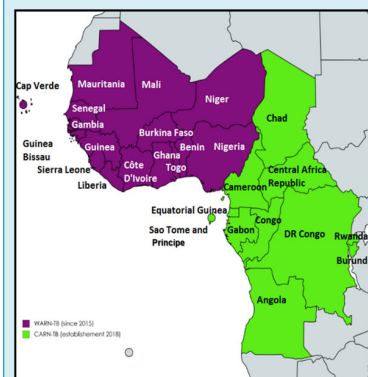
- ◇ Identify potential funding partners in the region to secure their support or involvement,
- ◇ Establish and maintain strong relationships with regional bodies and key partners to prioritize TB in the regional agenda.
- ◇ Coordinate annual meetings and conferences with co-chairs, solicit and collect input from members, prioritize issues, request support, and identify opportunities, prepare and disseminate minutes and reports.

During the first network meeting in Addis Ababa, the NTPs of Ethiopia and Malawi were elected to co-chair the secretariat for two years.

DRAWING EXPERIENCE FROM WARN/CARN TB

The West African Regional Network for Tuberculosis Control (WARN-TB) was created in March 2015 under the impetus of WHO/TDR and brought together the National Tuberculosis Programs (NTPs) of the 16 West African countries namely: Benin, Burkina-Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The network was born of the desire of the region's NTPs to pool their efforts and give a regional dimension to the fight against tuberculosis. In view of WARN-TB's achievements, the NTPs of the Central African region decided to replicate the initiative in their region. Thus was created the Central

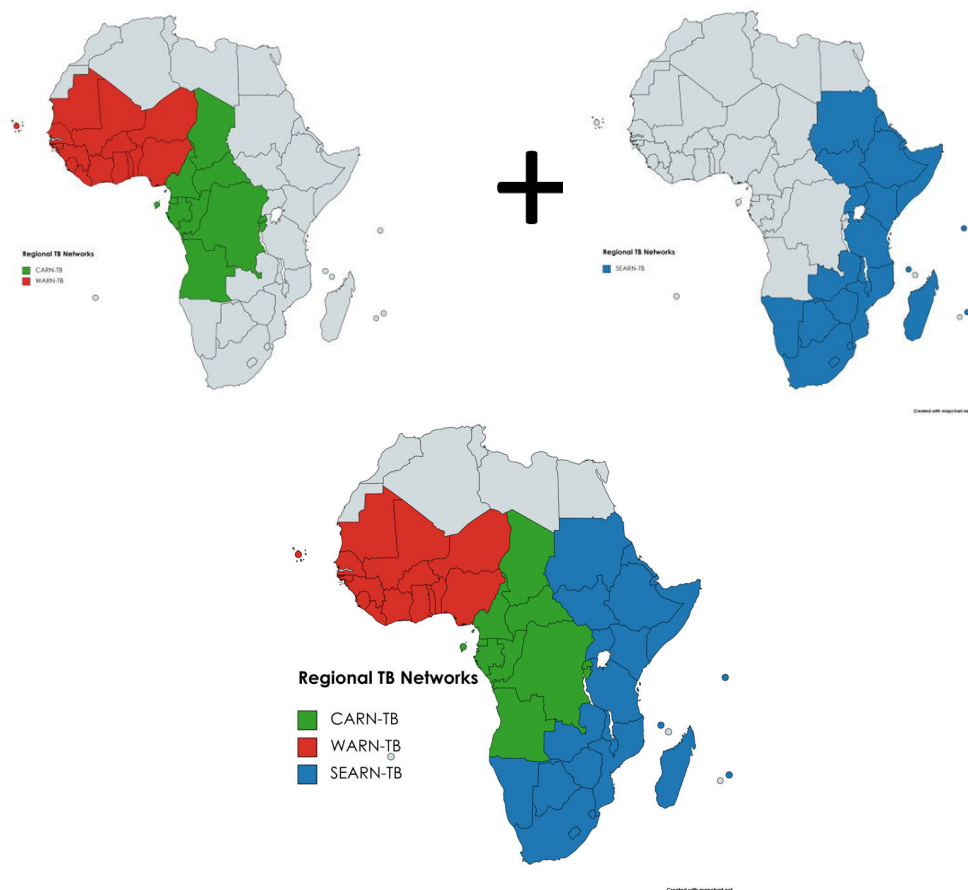
African Regional Network for Tuberculosis Control (CARN-TB) in July 2018, bringing together the NTPs of the 11 Central African countries namely: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, DRC, Central African Republic, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Chad. However, to enable CARN-TB to capitalize on WARN-TB's experience, a joint executive secretariat has been retained for both networks. This secretariat is based in Cotonou (Benin) and comprises Professor Dissou AFFOLABI (Executive Secretary), Professor Ablo Prudence WACHINOU (Deputy Executive Secretary), and Dr. Christ Kevin HOUSSINON (Technical Assistant).



Member countries of the WARN/CARN-TB network

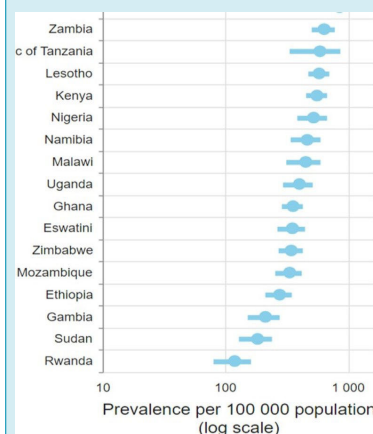
WARN/CARN-TB network offers a special platform for exchanges, collaboration, joint project development, mutual support, and experience sharing between the 27 member countries, in order to strengthen the various aspects of tuberculosis control in each country and on a regional scale.

SYNERGY OF EFFORTS (WARN/CARN AND SEARN-TB NETWORKS)



Left to right Dr. Christ Kevin HOUSSINON Technical Assistant, WARN/CARN-TB, Professor Ablo Prudence WACHINOU Deputy Executive Secretary, WARN/CARN-TB, and Professor Dissou AFFOLABI Executive Secretary WARN/CARN-TB.

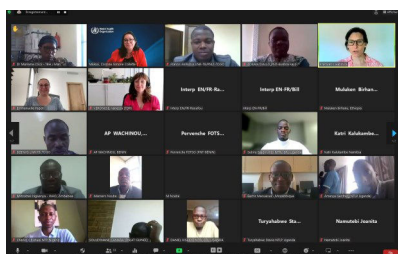
WHO Estimates of the prevalence of bacteriologically confirmed pulmonary TB in surveys completed 2007–2021



NEWS AND UPDATES

Week long Online training held on (IR4DTB)

An online training workshop on implementation research for digital technologies in support of tuberculosis care in fragile contexts was held via Zoom from 29th May – 2nd June 2023.



The training is based on the Implementation Research for Digital Technologies and TB (IR4DTB) toolkit <https://www.ir4dtb.org/> which guides national TB programs on how to mount IR projects specifically geared towards digital technologies.

The workshop resulted in research proposals that will test or investigate new digital strategies to enhance their TB national response. Financial and technical assistance will be provided by TDR to support the NTPs in Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda (SRL), Uganda (NTLP) to strengthen their national responses to TB through the use of digital technologies in their respective countries.

SEARN-TB website under development

To increase the visibility of the network and provide updated information, the SEARN-TB secretariat is developing its official website. The new website, in addition to providing news, updates, and resources for the region, it will be linked to the WARN/CARN-TB website, which is also under development and will expand the visi-

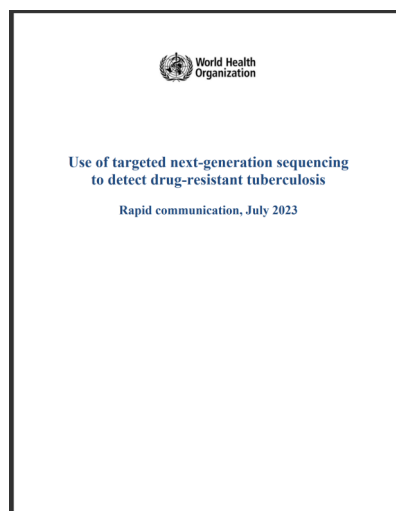
bility of the network.

WHO shared rapid communication on the use of targeted next generation sequencing to detect MDR TB

Key findings

- ◇ Targeted next-generation sequencing was found to be accurate
- ◇ Targeted next-generation sequencing was found to be cost-effective depending on the context
- ◇ Targeted next-generation sequencing was found to be acceptable and implementable under routine conditions, despite the inherent complexity

The rapid communication also listed



products and drugs for which eligible data met the class-based performance criteria.

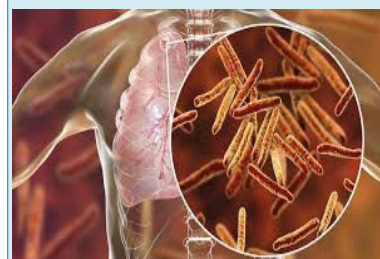
To get access to the full document follow the link below: [Use of targeted next-generation sequencing to detect drug-resistant tuberculosis \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/use-of-targeted-next-generation-sequencing-to-detect-drug-resistant-tuberculosis)

An International Workshop on Strengthening TB Surveillance for M&E focal points to be held in Addis Ababa

With financial and technical support from The Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), The German Federal Ministry of Health, the Robert Koch Institute, and the Global TB Program of WHO, the secretariat of the Southern and East African Regional Network for TB Control (SEARN-TB) network is organizing an in-person workshop among the focal points for Monitoring and Evaluation from all 22 National TB Programs of SEARN-TB. The workshop will be held from 23-26 Oct, 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

SEARN-TB network's first webinar held in 22 September

In collaboration with GTB, WHO/TDR, and the SEARN-TB secretariat, the first network webinar is held September 22 titled "Systematic TB screening and active case finding" a topic selected by the majority of NTP managers via WhatsApp poll. In addition country experience on Drug-resistant TB case-finding and TB care among the nomadic San communities in Namibia was presented by Dr. Nunurai Ruswa of Namibia and Country experience with TB preventive treatment in Malawi was presented by Dr. Tisungane Mwenyenkulu from Malawi.





Dr. James Mpunga

Malawi NTLEP manager and co-chair of SEARN-TB Secretariat

The Vision of Malawi NTLEP is to have a TB and Leprosy free Malawi with a mission of ensuring effective, equitable and accessible TB and Leprosy prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care services in Malawi. Its goals are to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis by 50 % and its mortality by 75% by the end of 2025 compared to the 2015.

MEET NATIONAL TUBERCULOSIS AND LEPROSY ELIMINATION PROGRAM (NTLEP) OF MALAWI

The National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Elimination Program (NTLEP) of the Ministry of Health in Malawi is mandated to offer technical and policy guidance in the implementation of Tuberculosis care, treatment and preventive services in the country.

The program has over the years recorded tremendous improvements in some of the key indicators. TB incidence has declined by 31% in the last seven years. This has been complemented by a decline in the TB/HIV co-infection rate by 43% coupled with a decline in the overall mortality rate by also 43%. The treatment coverage has increased from 55% in 2021 to 75% in 2022. This entails that more work needs to be done to reduce the treatment coverage gap.

NTLEP has managed to strengthen the case finding efforts at different level including strengthening of active case finding using

mobile diagnostic units for the key and vulnerable populations, it has rolled out the implementation of FAST (>100 Facilities using different models) which has contributed to an increase in presumptive identified and cases notified, introduction of 10 color Xpert ultra platforms to improve drug susceptibility testing, quality Improvement initiatives in selected districts with high death rate, resource mobilization for Leprosy, Integration of leprosy /TB activities, Contact investigation for Leprosy, Training TB/HIV /Leprosy, integrated multi testing on Xpert ultra platforms, accreditation of the national tuberculosis reference laboratory etc..

The program has also encountered several challenges as it strives to end TB by 2030. Key among these are infrastructure, supply and sustainability challenges of key interventions towards ending TB by 2030.



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