



## INVITED SPEAKERS

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### **Poison control in resource-poor areas**

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**Poisoning presents a significant public health burden in resource-poor countries** which often lack well-equipped healthcare facilities, trained medical personnel, and access to essential medications and antidotes for poisoning exposures.

Public education on poisoning awareness is lacking and this spur high rates of accidental poisonings. In many developing countries, people live in poor and crowded areas, and this leads to an ideal breeding ground for pests. People seek cheap and effective ways to deal with the problem and are exposed to dangerous pesticides. Furthermore, communities rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods and improper handling of agricultural chemicals can lead to pesticide poisoning. Other problems include lack of access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and hygiene, industrial and environmental pollution and the use of traditional medicine and herbal remedies that are often made from poisonous plants or substances.

Several African countries such as Mozambique, Malawi, and South Sudan rank among the poorest in the world. These countries face economic and developmental challenges, such as poverty, political instability, lack of infrastructure, and access to basic services. It is estimated that Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) accommodates more than 1.1 billion people and covers approximately 9.34 million square miles. Yet only 8 of the 49 (16%) countries have a Poison Information Centre.

A descriptive study assessing PIC information in Africa was carried out over 3 months (July-September 2021) by an independent consultant, under the direction of members of the WHO African Regional Office. The oldest PIC is South Africa's Tygerberg Poisons Information Centre which was established in 1977 and the centre in Burundi is the most recent one, created in 2021. In this study, it was noted that several PICs express difficulties in accessing a toxicology database and having access to IT and other communication resources.

Another study conducted over 2 years (January 2012 to December 2013), focused on the feasibility of a subregional poison centre in the eastern African subregion. This project encouraged countries to establish their own PICs and to network and coordinate these through a network hub.



In 2018 the African Network of Poisons Control Centres (ANPCC) was established to support WHO member states in the African region to effectively strengthen their systems of poison prevention to reduce the burden of poisoning.

The NIHR RIGHT4: Preventing Deaths from Acute Poisoning in Low-and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) project, initiated in 2023 aims to improve the clinical care of acute poisoning in low and middle-income countries and build PIC capacity. Our focus includes poisoning prevention and education, local partnerships, training of healthcare workers and providing toxicology information resources.

Resource-poor areas face significant challenges, but with strategic planning, community involvement, and partnerships, it is possible to improve poison prevention, recognition, and treatment, even in these settings.