

The Role of Civil Society Organizations and Communities in the Fight Against Antimicrobial Resistance

Brazzaville – Amid growing concern over the public health threat posed by antimicrobial resistance (AMR), the WHO Regional Office for Africa brought together experts, civil society actors, and community leaders for a dynamic regional webinar aimed at redefining the role of grassroots engagement in Africa's AMR response.

The virtual gathering, titled “The Role of Civil Society Organizations and Communities in the Fight Against Antimicrobial Resistance,” brought together stakeholders from across the continent to confront one of the most pressing public health challenges of our time. Moderated by Kapona Otridah and headlined by AMR expert Dr Raphael Chanda, the session called for a paradigm

shift: putting people—not just policy—at the heart of Africa's AMR response.

The webinar opened with remarks from Dr Walter Fuller, who issued a compelling call to action grounded in a people-centered approach. He emphasized the indispensable role of CSOs, faith-based organizations, and community structures in bridging the persistent gap between policy and on-the-ground practice, adding that the 2024 UN General Assembly Political Declaration on AMR, reaffirms the critical role of civil society in promoting awareness, supporting national action plans, advocating a One Health approach, and contributing to sustainable AMR solutions.

Why It Matters:

The stakes could not be higher. Projections estimate that bacterial **AMR could claim 39 million lives globally by 2050**—three every minute—with Africa disproportionately at risk due to limited healthcare infrastructure and rampant antibiotic misuse.

Dr Chanda emphasized that AMR is fundamentally a community-level issue. The misuse and overuse of antibiotics—driven by misinformation, self-medication, and inadequate healthcare access—are rooted in behaviours that can be reshaped through education and trust-building. CSOs, with their deep-rooted community networks and advocacy experience, are uniquely positioned to localize national AMR policies, raise awareness, and foster behaviour change through culturally sensitive strategies.

He pointed to a host of successful civil society-led initiatives already making waves: from national action plan participation to innovative public education efforts using theatre, radio, youth clubs, and school-based programs. Yet, the path remains strewn with challenges—limited funding, fragmented coordination, and a lack of technical know-how continue to hamper CSOs' full potential.

To overcome these barriers, Dr Chanda outlined a roadmap to strengthen and institutionalize CSO participation:

embedding them in national AMR governance structures, enhancing capacity on One Health and policy advocacy, leveraging digital tools, and building cross-sector partnerships, particularly with agriculture, environment, water, and sanitation sectors.

In a compelling case study, he spotlighted India's Antibiotic Smart Community initiative by **ReAct Asia Pacific**, demonstrating how small, context-specific interventions can scale when bolstered by **storytelling, data, and inclusive communication**. “*It's not just about having the right message—it's also about having the right messengers,*” he noted.

The webinar closed on a note of optimism and momentum. Participants expressed keen interest in establishing a regional community of practice—a collaborative space for sharing knowledge, experiences, and strategies to deepen civil society engagement in AMR.

Webinar outcomes:

- Scalable People centered approach to addressing AMR promoted
- Grassroots education and advocacy strengthened
- Cultural and localized approaches to combatting AMR boosted
- CSO capacity on one health and policy advocacy enhanced
- CSOs enabled to build cross-sector partnerships, particularly with agriculture, environment, water and sanitation sectors

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In conclusion:

The message was clear: tackling AMR requires more than prescriptions and policies—it demands trust, education, and grassroots action. And in that effort, civil society is not a peripheral player, but a central force in turning the tide.