

# EAC RCE-VIHSCM NEWSLETTER 9<sup>th</sup> Edition:

October-December, 2023



## Welcome Note:

We are delighted to present to you recent updates from the last quarter, showing our ongoing journey of capacitating health sector professionals involved in supply chain management of vaccines and other health commodities in East African and beyond.

This edition marks another chapter spotlighting collaborative endeavors with our partners to progress the much-needed knowledge and expertise through training, upskilling and research initiatives. We hope that this newsletter gives you information and news that you can share with others in telling the story of UR/EAC RCE-VIHSCM. Thank you for being part of our growing community - your support is always appreciated!

## ▪ TRAINING EXCELLENCE

### UR/EAC RCE-VIHSCM Hosts Engaging Lecture on Vaccine Development and Medicine Financing

The University of Rwanda's East African Community Regional Centre of Excellence for Vaccines, Immunization, and Health Supply Chain Management (UR/EAC RCE-VIHSCM) organized a hybrid public lecture themed "Vaccine Development and Medicine Financing."



*Officials pose for a photo after the IVI public lecture on Vaccine Development and Medicine Financing*

Conducted at the University of Rwanda College of Medicine and Health Sciences (UR-CMHS) on October 5, 2023, the event attracted a diverse audience, including UR students, faculty, researchers, healthcare professionals, policymakers, members of the public, who are passionate about vaccine development and healthcare financing.

The healthcare professionals from the International Vaccines Institute (IVI) spearheaded the lecture series. Prof. Jerome Kim, the Director General of IVI, provided an overview and updates on vaccines, while Prof. Anh Wartel, the Deputy DG of IVI, delved into the details of clinical trials for licensure. Additionally, Prof. George Bickerstaff, Chair of the IVI Board, explored avenues for financing future medical advancements.



The event fortified the collaborative relationship between UR, EAC RCE-VIHSCM, and IVI, underscoring the mutual commitment to knowledge sharing and dissemination thereby advancing global health through vaccine research.

*Prof. Jerome Kim, IVI Director General delivering a lecture on Vaccines Overview & Updates*



*Dr. Yvan Butera, Rwanda Minister of State in the Ministry of Health during the public lecture*

In his address, Dr. Yvan Butera, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Health and the event's Guest of Honour, emphasized the lecture's relevance to Rwanda's healthcare aspirations. Dr. Butera highlighted Rwanda's strides towards vaccine production, encouraging students, researchers, and educators to engage in research and envision themselves as future pioneers in vaccine development. "We urge students and educators to actively participate in research endeavors, positioning themselves as key contributors to our nation's healthcare evolution," he noted.

The lecture not only facilitated knowledge sharing but also stimulated professionals to play an instrumental role in advancing vaccine research and healthcare within the East African Community (EAC) region. The EAC RCE-VIHSCM remains at the forefront, in promoting collaboration and exchanging knowledge in vital sectors like vaccine development.

## **EAC RCE-VIHSCM launches new Master's programme: MSc in Pharmaceutical Analysis and Quality Assurance (MPAQA)**

On November 1, 2023, the EAC RCE-VIHSCM inaugurated its much-anticipated Master of Science in Pharmaceutical Analysis and Quality Assurance (MPAQA) for the 2023-2024 academic year. This premier programme started off with 29 students from seven East African Community (EAC) Partner States: Republic of Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Kenya, Republic of Rwanda, Republic of South Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda.

An induction week commenced on October 30, 2023, followed by two weeks of intensive face-to-face lectures introducing students to their first semester modules. The academic journey was officially inaugurated and graced by notable figures such as Prof. Kayihura Muganga Didas, Ag. Vice Chancellor of the University of Rwanda, and Amb. Margaret N. Kedisi from the Uganda High Commission in Rwanda. Representatives from the Kenya High Commission in Rwanda and the Rwanda Ministry of Foreign Affairs also honored the occasion.



*Officials together with MPAQA students pose for a photo at the programme's official launch on November 1, 2023*



*Ambassador Margaret Kedisi, Deputy Head of Mission, Uganda High Commissioner to Rwanda delivering remarks at the MPAQA launch*

Ambassador Margaret Kedisi from the Uganda High Commission in Rwanda extended her gratitude and commendations to Rwanda, specifically acknowledging the University of Rwanda for hosting this significant training through the Centre of Excellence. "Being part of this community, we are confident that this venture will not only succeed but also surpass expectations," Kedisi remarked. She also emphasized the critical role of the students, stating, "Your contributions in the realm of health are essential to humanity. Your endeavors resonate deeply with our existence, and we hold high hopes for your future impact."



*Mr. Francis Bukuzagara from MINAFFET delivering remarks*

Representing the Rwanda Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Francis Bukuzagara, the Director General of Africa, acknowledged the profound impact of collaboration across diverse domains. Stressing its crucial role in shaping the future, he commented, "Today, as we celebrate this academic achievement, we also recognize the important aspect of unity which defines our collective dedication to advancing healthcare and building enduring connections within the EAC region and across Africa as a whole."



*Prof. Kayihura Muganga Didas, Vice Chancellor of the University of Rwanda, addresses the new MPAQA students*

In his address, Prof. Kayihura welcomed the students to the University of Rwanda community, urging them to seize this scholarship opportunity to excel in the MPAQA programme. He underscored the programme's mission: to nurture graduates' proficiency in vaccine development, production, integration, pharmaceutical analysis, and quality assurance.

The MPAQA is a two years programme and is structured into four semesters. It uses a blended learning approach that integrates in-person sessions, online modules, and practical field experiences. This approach facilitates effective skill transfer while accommodating participants' professional commitments in their respective countries. "The programme's objective is to improve expertise in vaccine and pharmaceutical analysis and quality assurance along the supply chain management".

## **EAC RCE-VIHSCM marks the Graduation of its 3rd Health Supply Chain Management Cohort**

Continuing its commitment to bridge the human resource capacity gap in health supply chain management (HSCM) within the EAC region, the EAC RCE-VIHSCM achieved a significant milestone on November 17, 2023. A total of 37 students successfully earned their Master's degree in Health Supply Chain Management during the 9<sup>th</sup> Graduation ceremony of the University of Rwanda in Musanze district.



*Masters in Health Supply Chain Management 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort graduates from EAC Partner States*



*Mr. Green Sadru, MHSCM graduate from the United Republic of Tanzania*

Mr. Green Sadru, from the United Republic of Tanzania, conveyed his appreciation, saying, "The firm commitment of the University of Rwanda/EAC RCE-VIHCSCM has prepared us to excel as proficient experts in health supply chain management."

Initiated in 2017, the Master's Programme in Health Supply Chain Management (MHSCM) by EAC RCE-VIHCSCM was a direct response to the findings of the EAC's comprehensive assessment report of August 2014. The report highlighted a significant challenge, which was the critical shortage of qualified human resources within the health supply chain space. Building on this foundation, the programme has successfully graduated cohorts in 2019 and 2022, consisting of 25 and 35 students from various EAC Partner States, respectively.



*Ms. Patricia L. Campbell, Chancellor of the University of Rwanda presiding over the graduation ceremony*

## Cold Chain Equipment Management Training for Gambian EPI Staff

Building on the success of Cold Chain Equipment Management (CCEM) courses conducted for healthcare professionals across Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Eritrea (non-EAC country), the EAC RCE-VIHSCM expanded its reach to include 9 EPI Managers from The Gambia who attended the second course on CCEM together with 26 participants from Rwanda Health Facilities.

The initiative is part of the ongoing partnership between UNICEF and EAC RCE-VIHSCM, aiming to strengthen effective vaccine management regionally, while developing knowledge and skills solutions to address performance issues among EPI Staff.



*Republic of The Gambia and Rwanda participants of the Cold Chain Equipment Management short course mix; December 11-15 2023*

Conducted from December 11-15, 2023, in Kigali, Rwanda, the training featured specialized trainers in CCEM. Highlights included field visits to Rwanda's vaccine national warehouse, Rwanda Biomedical Center Vaccines Preventable Diseases Programme Unit (VPDP), Masaka District hospital and Gikondo Health Center.

Lamin Ceesay, a Senior Logistics Officer with the Gambia's Immunisation Programme (EPI), commended the course, emphasizing, "Vaccines stand at the heart of every EPI initiative. This training has been instrumental, shedding light on essential facets of vaccine and Cold Chain Equipment management. With this newfound knowledge, our goal is to refine our EPI training manual for our immunization service providers in our home country."

EAC RCE-VIHSCM continues its efforts to deliver the Cold Chain Equipment Management (CCEM) training to different groups of interested candidates from EAC and non-EAC countries. Our primary objective is to enhance the performance of Immunization Supply Chain Management, ensuring impactful progress in this crucial aspect of healthcare delivery.

## ▪ UPSKILLING TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS

### Introductory GxP Course Hosted in Seoul Supports EAC Vaccine Manufacturing

The EAC RCE-VIHSCM reaffirmed its commitment to boosting vaccine manufacturing within the EAC region by sponsoring 15 delegates for the Introductory GxP (Good Practices) course held in Seoul, South Korea, from October 30<sup>th</sup> to November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023.



*EAC Partner State participants at the Introductory course for Standard Practice (GXP) held in Seoul, South Korea, October 30 – November 17, 2023*

This programme was a collaborative effort between the International Vaccine Institute (IVI), the Ministry of Health and Welfare of South Korea, and the World Health Organization.

The GxP framework encapsulates vital guidelines and standards that oversee product quality, safety, and effectiveness. These standards, including Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), Good Laboratory Practice (GLP), and Good Clinical Practice (GCP), are fundamental in ensuring excellence across various industry processes and product quality.





*All participants of the Introductory course for Standard Practice (GXP)*



*Participants during an industry visit*

Over the intensive three-week course, participants delved deep into GxP principles, particularly GMP, GLP, and GCP, gaining essential insights into their applications within the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors. They also had the invaluable opportunity to visit GMP-compliant manufacturing facilities, providing them with a hands-on understanding of GMP principles, quality benchmarks, and bio manufacturing techniques.

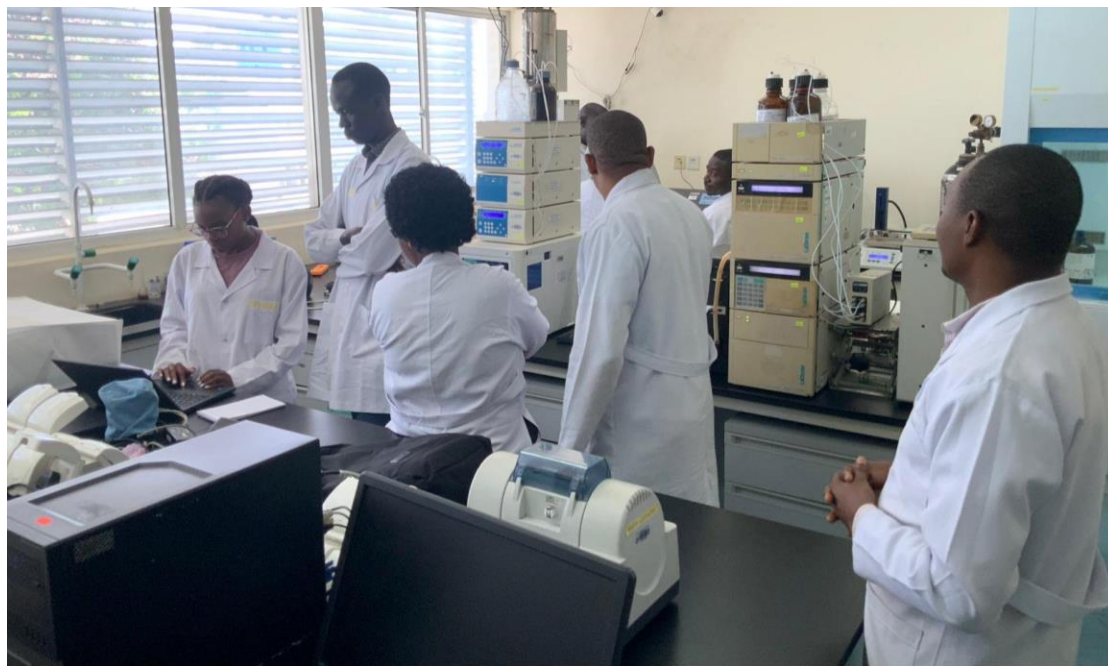
With this enriched expertise, EAC RCE-VIHSCM is optimistic that these trained professionals are now primed to uphold elevated standards of quality, safety, and regulatory compliance within vaccine manufacturing. This collaboration was made possible through the ongoing partnership between the University of Rwanda and the International Vaccine Institute (IVI).



## **Workshop on “Analytical techniques” at Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS), Tanzania**

Laboratories heavily rely on a vast array of sophisticated equipment and instruments. Ensuring their accuracy, precision, and reliability is paramount. It is therefore imperative to uphold rigorous standards in Analytical techniques, covering facets like installation, operational procedures, and performance assessment, to ensure the credibility of lab results.

In collaboration with Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, United Republic of Tanzania, the EAC RCE-VIHSCM organized two specialized training workshops on Analytical techniques namely, ‘Analytical methods development and validation” and “Comprehensive Laboratory Quality and Equipment Management for delegates from National Medicines Regulatory Authorities (NMRAs) across EAC Partner States.

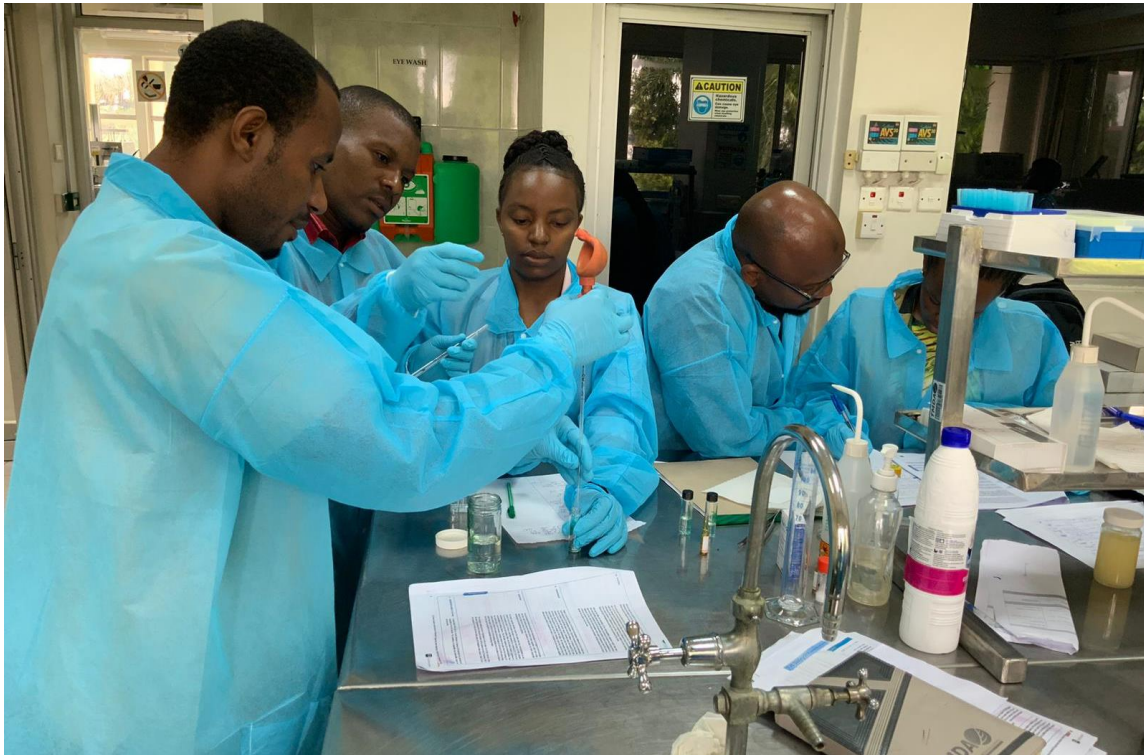


*Participants engaged in the laboratory during the Analytical techniques training*

The first round of this course took place from November 27th to December 8th, 2023, with 16 participants, followed by the second round from November 6th to 17th, 2023, with 8 participants, both conducted at MUHAS's Pharmaceutical Research and Development Laboratory.

Through this training, participants gained fundamental knowledge and hands-on skills essential for elevating the quality and efficacy of laboratory practices.

## In-Country Trainings on “Analysis of medicines using the GPHF Minilab” for Rwanda and URT Professionals



*United Republic of Tanzania (URT) Quality control personnel during the training on Minilabs 'Analysis of Medicines' Training*

After securing and donating GPHF Minilabs to medicine regulatory agencies of EAC Partner States, EAC RCE-VIHSCM embarked on delivering training sessions for the professionals responsible for operating these kits throughout the EAC region. These training sessions *on 'Analysis of Medicines using the GPHF Minilabs'*, are crucial for enhancing the trainees' ability to rapidly and cost-effectively screen the quality of medicines using the Minilab kits.

From October 16th to 20th, 2023, the training was delivered to professionals from various entities in Rwanda, including the Rwanda Food and Drug Authority (RFDA), Rwanda Medical Supply (RMS), "Bureau des Formations Médicales Agréées du Rwanda" (BUFMAR), College of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (CAVM) and technical staff from the University of Rwanda's Huye Biotechnology Laboratory Complex.

Similarly, between October 30th and November 3rd, 2023, EAC RCE-VIHSCM extended the training to participants in the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) from the Tanzania Medicines and Medical Devices Authority (TMDA), the Medical Store Department (MSD), Zanzibar Food and Drug Authority (ZFDA), and Zanzibar Central Medical Store.

This training significantly strengthened participants' expertise in utilizing GPHF Minilab technology, reinforcing medicine quality oversight in both Rwanda and United Republic of Tanzania.

The overarching goal of these trainings is to empower the EAC region's supply chain personnel with robust capabilities for promptly and affordably assessing health products entering the market. This proactive approach will also help in detecting any potentially substandard or counterfeit medicines, safeguarding public health in the region.

EAC RCE-VIHSCM's ability to execute this training was made possible through the generous funding from the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) via the German Development Bank (KfW). Future plans include extending the training to NMRAs from the remaining countries (Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan) after successfully kicking it off for Rwanda and URT.

- **RESEARCH UPDATES**

### **Digital Innovation platform for Pooled Procurement Framework under development**

In a bid to enhance availability of health commodities throughout the East African Community (EAC), EAC RCE-VIHSCM worked with the EAC Secretariat to advance the creation of a Digital Data Sharing Platform.

This platform aims to streamline the EAC Pooled Procurement Framework (PPF). The maturation of this idea was achieved during the inaugural DIDATI (Digital Health, Data, Technologies & Innovations System) development taskforce workshop that took place from 2nd to 10th October 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The workshop convened EAC Regional Digital Health Facilitators, System Architects, and Developers, as well as software experts responsible for tailoring EAC systems. Additionally, ICT specialists from Partner States' Central/National Medical Stores and Supply Chain Management focal persons were also in attendance to develop inputs to the platform and system requirements.

Significant outcomes included fine-tuning technical requirements for the digital platform and developing a prototype designed to support the EAC Pooled Procurement Framework.

### **Empowering Research – EAC RCE-VIHSCM Grant Writing Workshop**



Strengthening grant writing capabilities stands central to EAC RCE-VIHSCM's mission to strengthen research grant writing competencies to support application to different research grants and subsequently attract funding for VIHSCM research.



*EAC RCE-VIHSCM Grant-writing workshop participants; November 19-24, 2023*

To this end, EAC RCE-VIHSCM organized a grant-writing workshop from November 20-24, 2023, focusing on empowering participants with the essential knowledge and skills to develop compelling grant proposals. Such proficiency is key for garnering crucial funding for VIHSCM research and technical interventions.

The workshop was facilitated by Raphael Broniatowski, an accomplished researcher and expert in health and social development from GOPA, attracted participants from the College of Medicines, and Health Sciences, University of Rwanda. The participants held diverse roles encompassing research, finance, and grant management.

In the immediate aftermath of the training, participants acquired hands-on grant writing capabilities applicable across various sectors. Furthermore, they strengthened their proficiency in obtaining funding, approvals, and ensuring project success, enhancing their project management and communication skills. Looking forward, the EAC RCE-VIHSCM envisions forming a specialized grant proposal or acquisition team to spearhead funding application opportunities, submissions, as well as grant project implementation and monitoring.

## **Call for Research Grant Proposals in Vaccines, Immunization and Health Supply Chain Management (VIHSCM)**

Among the objectives of EAC RCE-VIHSCM are achieving excellence in research and dissemination of knowledge that informs the evidence base and best practices and innovation in VIHSCM. In line with this, the EAC RCE-VIHSCM is launching a call for research proposals in the following priority areas:

- Priority Area 1. Access to essential medicines and vaccines
- Priority Area 2. Use of innovation and technologies in VIHSCM

- Priority Area 3. Effective management of vaccines
- Priority Area 4. Supply Chain workforce: availability and strategies to build Human Resources
- Priority Area 5. Quality of medicines
- Priority Area 6. Financing of medicines and vaccines

More information on this call can be accessed here: <https://hscm.ur.ac.rw/research-innovation-and-technical-assistance/>

## Upcoming Events:

1. PtD Global Indaba - Mar 6-8, 2024, Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel, Bangkok  
EAC RCE-VIHSCM topic: *Health Supply Chain Workforce in the East African Community through Professionalization.*
2. In-country CCEM Trainings for Kenya, South Sudan and Tanzania between February – May 2024
3. Immunization Supply Chain for Gambia and Malawi EPI Staff in February 2024.

### Contact:

Website: <https://hscm.ur.ac.rw>

Twitter: [EacRceVihscm](#)

Facebook: [EacRce Vihscm](#)

LinkedIn: [Eac Rce-Vihscm](#)

Website: <https://hscm.ur.ac.rw>



### OUR VISION

To become an autonomous, well recognized, top-class, regional knowledge hub, providing high quality pre- and in-service training and disseminating best practices in vaccines, immunization and health supply chain management.

### OUR MISSION

To contribute to solving existing performance challenges of the health supply chain management (HSCM) system in the EAC region through the generation of knowledge and its translation into research, policy and practice.



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  [info.rcevihscm@ur.ac.rw](mailto:info.rcevihscm@ur.ac.rw)

