

OSHAfrica 2019 Conference

Dr Ntombizodwa Ndlovu, Chief Rapporteur, OSHAfrica 2019 Conference, e-mail: zodwa.ndlovu@wits.ac.za

This report presents highlights from the OSHAfrica 2019 Conference Organising Committee Report.

BACKGROUND AND CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The idea for OSHAfrica to host a conference was born at a meeting of African occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals held during the ICOH2018 Conference in Dublin, Ireland. Subsequently, this nascent group of African OSH professionals chose South Africa as the host country for the first OSHAfrica Conference. Drs Thuthula Balfour and Claire Deacon, Conference Co-chairs, convened an Organising Committee of occupational health professionals. They worked tirelessly to organise the first-ever pan-African occupational health conference, which was successfully held at Emperors Palace Conference Centre, Johannesburg, from 18 to 20 September 2019.

The Conference Organising Committee members were:

- Dr Thuthula Balfour (Conference Co-chair), Minerals Council South Africa
- Dr Claire Deacon (Conference Co-chair), Nelson Mandela University
- Dr Dingani Moyo, Baines Occupational Medicine Centre, Zimbabwe, University of the Witwatersrand, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe
- Leigh McMaster, Minerals Council South Africa
- Dr Cas Badenhorst, Anglo American plc
- Leighton Bennett, Benrisk Consulting
- Wellington Mudenha, Synthecon Sutures Manufacturing SA
- Norman Khoza, African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD)
- Ehi Iden, OSHAfrica
- Simphiwe Mabhele, International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Dr Muzimkhulu Zungu, National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), National Health Laboratory Service
- Peneyambeko Alina Munkawa, International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Bulelwa Huna, Department of Employment and Labour, South Africa
- Debbie Myer, National Safety
- Mzwakhe Nhlapo, National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)

Thirty-one countries across six continents were represented at the



Some of the OSHAfrica Conference Organising Committee members and the Honorable Minister of Health at the Closing Ceremony (L-R): Dr Claire Deacon (Conference Co-chair), Dr Dingani Moyo, Norman Khoza, Leighton Bennett, Dr Thuthula Balfour (Conference Co-chair), the Honorable Dr Zweli Mkhize (Minister of Health, South Africa), Simphiwe Mabhele, Debbie Myer, Ehi Iden and Wellington Mudenha

Photograph: Sipho Nkabinde, FPD

Conference. Of the 94 presenters, 40 were from South Africa, and 54 from other countries. Over 1 200 delegates attended the Conference, including 791 who were sponsored to attend.

In addition to the Welcome and Closing Ceremonies, the Conference programme included three plenary sessions, seven panel discussions and 18 parallel sessions. Presentations on topical issues were presented by academics and professionals working in OSH. There were 18 posters, covering a variety of topics, on display in the exhibition area for the duration of the Conference.

OPENING ADDRESS

The Conference was opened by the Honourable Minister of Mines and Mineral Development for Zambia, Mr Richard Musukwa. In his keynote opening address, he highlighted the staggering numbers of people in Africa who die from work-related accidents and diseases. Of approximately 2.78 million work-related deaths per year, some 1.6 million are due to work-related illnesses. The work-related disease and accident burden in Africa might be under-estimated, due to the unavailability of OSH policies, poor enforcement of these policies, inadequate detection of occupational diseases and poor reporting of the accidents and diseases.

Occupational accidents and diseases have far-reaching effects, which go beyond individuals to communities and contribute to poverty. Women, children, people with disabilities, migrant workers and ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable. Artisanal and small-scale mining and informal economies are growing on the African continent. There is a growing awareness of the importance of OSH by governments, employers and workers, and realisation that safer and healthier workplaces result in improved productivity.

The Zambian Government is working diligently to provide a favourable policy environment and regulatory framework for OSH in the mining sector, which is a major contributor to the economy. Zambia is working with the Governments of Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique in the Southern Africa Tuberculosis and Health Systems Support (SATBHSS) Project, a multi-sectorial project that aims to strengthen OSH in the participating countries. Zambia is also working in ten Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states on the Tuberculosis in Mining Societies (TIMS) project, a regional response to tuberculosis (TB) in miners. Governments, employers and workers should join hands in a renewed commitment to improve OSH on the continent.

THE STATUS QUO OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH IN AFRICA

In the first plenary session of the Conference, Franklin Muchiri (International Labour Organization (ILO)) highlighted the need for African countries to collect OSH data. This is key for determining OSH trends and the development of evidence-based strategies to protect the occupational safety and health of workers.

Dr Ivan Ivanov (World Health Organization (WHO)) focused on the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development with regard to health and labour in Africa. He noted that sub-Saharan Africa has 11% of the world's population, 25% of the global burden of disease, 3% of the world's health workers and < 1% of global health expenditure. A

number of WHO and ILO initiatives are underway to address the challenges on the continent.

Peter-John Jacobs (International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA)) advocated for the training of more occupational hygienists in Africa. He also encouraged occupational hygienists from all over the continent to join the IOHA.

TAKING LEADERSHIP IN OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH IN AFRICA

Presentations were delivered by Alan Stevens (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH)), Joaquim Pintado Nunes (ILO), Prof. Andrew Curran (Health and Safety Executive (HSE)), Ulrich Meesmann (International Social Security Association (ISSA) Mining), and Themba Mkwanazi (CEO, Zero Harm).

The five key messages from these presentations were:

1. Global investors are now taking OSH seriously and subscribe to the principles of responsible investment (PRI). PRI has the potential to impact the profitability of organisations in Africa in future.
2. The ILO recognises that OSH is fundamental to the future of work and has resolved that it must be included in the fundamental principles and rights at work.
3. African countries must begin to collect OSH data to allow regulatory bodies to know the OSH problems in their jurisdictions, and to implement safety principles that in turn promote innovation among employers.
4. Zero Harm is an essential tool for protecting the health and safety of workers globally.
5. The Zero Harm forum promotes heartfelt leadership through a common belief system and shared values. Only people-centred leadership can reduce occupational fatalities and injuries in the mining sector in South Africa and beyond.

THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

In this plenary session, presenters provided insights into the future of work, OSH significance in the African economy, and the sustainable future of work. The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) will bring exponential change with implications for worker health and safety in the future.

Commissioner Mthunzi Ledwaba (ILO, SA) spoke about the future of work and highlighted that the way we work and the way we do business is changing. In order to keep pace with the digital transformation we need innovative, creative and adaptable policy responses that are flexible. There are no one-size-fits-all rules or procedures. Maximum benefits will be achieved by changing our attitudes and approach to the future of work.

There are many benefits of digitalisation, including decreased accidents, and workers no longer having to do dangerous or physically intense tasks (e.g. robots can be used to remove asbestos and allow workers to improve their work-life balance). Work can focus on tasks where human input is essential (i.e. critical decision making, emotional intelligence and value judgement).

Will robots cause job destruction? There is a fear that sustained unemployment will threaten people's mental health and wellbeing. It is unlikely that entire occupations or jobs will be automated but there will be a need for the replacement and adaptation of specific tasks, and reskilling of workers. We cannot predict exactly what type of technology will exist in the future and what the OSH implications will be. Innovative, modern policy frameworks will be required. Trust and respect between workers and employers is paramount.

In her talk, Advocate Hanlie van Vuuren, Solidarity, focused on future opportunities and challenges for workers. She emphasised that the 4IR is here and that it is the speed of change that distinguishes it from previous industrial revolutions. This revolution uses computerisation to digitise more areas of life, and integration of artificial intelligence in production and consumption. It focuses on higher productivity, efficiency and profit rather than labour consolidation or growth.

Challenges

- Trade unionism or collective bargaining may consequently be threatened, yet organised labour appears silent on the subject.
- Companies are already laying off workers and shops are closing to be replaced by online shopping.
- New technologies may bring new occupational diseases (e.g. nanotechnology, which is associated with occupational lung disease).
- New technologies threaten to amplify current inequalities, both within and between countries.

Opportunities

- Humans cannot be completely replaced by robots. The Henn na Hotel in Japan opened in 2015 and was mainly run by robots. By January 2019, half of the 243 robots had been decommissioned because they could not replace many tasks done by humans.
- Technological advances in renewable energy, fuel efficiency and energy storage make business sense and help mitigate climate change.
- Continuous extraction methods of natural resources (e.g. minerals and the associated OSH risks) may become redundant, as materials are recirculated and not wasted;
- Labour unions need to be vigilant and to work in tripartite structures with governments and business to protect workers.

To address OSH challenges on the African continent, Ehi Iden (Occupational Health and Safety Managers) suggested the following steps be taken:

1. Development of a single African OSH Act which could begin with a review of all signed OSH conventions for domestication;
2. Introduction of basic OSH modules into the curricula of all undergraduate programmes in African universities; and
3. Introduction of health and safety management training and internship programmes for the informal sector.

Looking at the future of work on the continent, he called for:

1. "Displacement and replacement" by transition from old economy jobs to newer economy jobs through access and use of digital technologies;
2. Investment in scholarship schemes that incentivise African students to return home after completing their studies abroad;
3. "Reducing informality of work through reskilling" to move more African people into the formal sector, which fits the future of work; and
4. Africa to be placed at the heart of all OSH discussions.

"If we cannot do all these, the Africa of OUR DREAM may never be realised and posterity will ask us questions," he said.

CLOSING ADDRESS

The South African Minister of Health, the Honorable Dr Zweli Mkhize, opened his speech by congratulating the organisers for successfully hosting the first pan-African occupational safety and health conference.

He noted a number of OSH-related initiatives and challenges currently facing the continent. Much research was done in the 1950s and 1960s on the effects of working under conditions of

extreme heat on mine workers in South Africa. The current increasing global temperatures bring new challenges, not only for mines, but also for many other workplaces. It is projected that temperatures may increase by 2–4 °C during the hottest months over the next decades, changing the occupational heat situation from low to moderate or high in much of the continent.

South Africa is on a journey toward universal health coverage through the national health insurance (NHI) funding model. Built into the NHI is a chapter on funding mechanisms for the healthcare of workers with occupational injuries and diseases.

African leaders committed to employment promotion, social protection and poverty alleviation by signing the 2004 Ouagadougou Declaration that recognised OSH as a driver for poverty. The Minister noted that this Conference would provide impetus to action the provisions of the Declaration. Other areas that need to be addressed with respect to OSH are the informal sector; youth, migrant, rural and contract workers; small-scale and artisanal mine workers; and workers in small, micro and medium enterprises. The social determinants of health should also be considered when designing OSH interventions.

Other challenges include ‘leap-frogging’ into the fourth industrial revolution. Many countries still have no, or weak and fragmented, OSH policy and legislative frameworks. There are also variable occupational exposure limits among countries. Do workers differ in physiology by country? Comprehensive occupational health services to diagnose and manage occupational injuries and diseases, and surveillance systems to monitor trends, are key. More suitably qualified and knowledgeable OSH professionals are required to address and improve OSH in Africa.

Although the two landmark international silica dust conferences were held Johannesburg in 1930 and 1959, the deliberations were not followed by meaningful actions and this resulted in many mine workers contracting other occupational lung diseases. The South African Department of Health is collaborating with The Minerals Council of South Africa, trade unions, ex-mine worker associations in neighbouring countries, and other stakeholders to assess and compensate ex-mine workers with occupational lung diseases. In addition, a landmark class action settlement on TB and silicosis in gold mine workers will administer four billion rands in compensation claims across the region. Similar class actions will be pursued against mining companies for coal workers’ pneumoconiosis in South Africa and lead poisoning in Zambia. Although compensation is commendable, it is the last resort. Prevention is the core principle of OSH.

The Minister ended with a call for action from Conference delegates: “You are the agents of change, implement and implement and implement!”

OSHAFRICA 2019 CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations were presented by Dr Ntombizodwa Ndlovu (University of the Witwatersrand). The development of these recommendations was a team effort, which used rapporteurs’ reports on Conference presentations and the expertise of team members to identify recurring and topical issues. Rather than attempt to summarise the many excellent presentations, cross-cutting issues were identified and framed around the seven golden rules of Vision Zero:

VISION

Africa without harmful occupational exposures, fatalities, injuries and diseases: wellbeing for all workers and communities

1. Take leadership—demonstrate commitment “Safety performance is a reflection of leadership”

This requires:

- Heartfelt leadership through common belief systems and a common set of values;
- Meaningful involvement of communities through a participatory approach;
- Visible action from leadership for all employees to see; and
- Investigation of ‘near misses’ as indicators of potential risks and opportunities for learning.

2. Identify hazards—control risks

This requires:

- Risk-based thinking in every activity;
- Risk assessments that are both gender sensitive and gender responsive, taking into account biological, intra-job variability, social context, etc.; and
- Vigilance and tripartite efforts to address the changes in the workplace as a result of rapid digitalization and new technologies that create new occupational hazards and risks.

3. Define targets—develop programmes

This requires:

- Setting of OSH targets that are evidence-based (i.e. based on data and research);
- Developing new, or reviewing existing, legislation that recognises there is a dearth of legislation in Africa;
- Ensuring policy implementation, enforcement, and monitoring and evaluation;
- Developing occupational disease and hazard surveillance systems and using the data to inform prevention and control measures; and
- Collecting OSH data at all levels of industry and feeding it into national and global statistics.

4. Ensure a safe, healthy and well-organised system

This calls for:

- Eliminating child labour; OSH is for adults — there is no need for OSH policies for children as children should not be in the workplace;
- Understanding human interactions within the work environment in order to minimise risks (e.g. through ergonomics); and
- Interventions to address fatigue and work-life balance (e.g. forward rotation instead of backward rotation to prevent disruption of circadian rhythms and associated adverse outcomes).

5. Ensure safety and health in machines, equipment and workplaces

This calls for:

- A recognition that the avoidance of hazards using technical measures makes prevention obsolete;
- The use of safe technology to protect human capital; and
- Healthy workplaces as a prerequisite for motivated workers.

Every worker must return home safe and healthy every day

6. Improve qualifications—develop competence

- Instil a culture of prevention.
- Introduce life-long OSH learning from pre-school (four years).
- Promote prevention through the use of pictures. There are existing resources that can be used or adapted (see http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_383797/lang-en/index.htm).
- Improve appropriate competence of OSH practitioners.

7. Invest in people—motivate by participation

- “A happy employee is a safe employee”—know employees by enhancing soft skills, dialogue and social interactions.

- Promote a culture of respect between and among employers and employees—say thank you, greet, and know employees by name.
- “Nothing about workers without them”—change the employees’ role in OSH from passive to active. Compliance with prevention programmes will improve if employees are part of defining them.

The key is to keep it simple: there is no need to implement all these recommendations at the same time. Choose low-lying fruit. It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel. Existing technologies or materials can be used as they are, or adapted to suit the needs.

Delegates were encouraged to operationalise these recommendations, which will be reviewed at the OSHAfrica 2022 Conference in Kenya.

All presentations are available from <http://www.oshafrica2019.com/PRESENTATIONS>

Contributors to the Conference recommendations:

Wellington Mudenha, Dr Thuthula Balfour, Simphiwe Mabhele, Dr Ntombizodwa Ndlovu, Norman Khoza, Dr Khanyile Baloyi, Ehi Iden, Dr Dingani Moyo, Bulelwa Huna

The OSHAfrica 2022 Conference

At the Closing Ceremony, the baton was handed over by Dr Thuthula Balfour to Sanjay Gandhi, the Chair of the OSHAfrica 2022 Conference Organising Committee.

Sanjay made the following remarks:

“Our heartiest congratulations to the Organising Committee for hosting the inaugural OSHAfrica 2019 Conference in Johannesburg from 18 to 20 September 2019! The Conference was a huge success and sets a benchmark for other OSHAfrica host countries to maintain the same, if not better, standard.

Among other things, the success of the event is attributed to (i) precise event organisation; (ii) excellent quality of speakers and their presentations; (iii) OSH-related exhibitors; and (iv) the Conference delegates. Everyone related positively to the event and, more importantly, took away learnings which can be applied in their respective countries for improving occupational safety and health (OSH) practices and performance.

Kenya is privileged to have been voted to host the OSHAfrica 2022 Conference and is grateful for the confidence bestowed upon us to deliver a successful event in the third quarter of 2022. Given its strategic geographic location, Nairobi is a vibrant,



Hub of east Africa, Nairobi will host the OSHAfrica 2022 Conference

safe, secure and cosmopolitan city that welcomes delegates from around the world to experience the warm hospitality, culture and ethnic cuisine. The national carrier, Kenya Airways, will provide delegates with excellent connectivity, while the fast, reliable and cost-effective Internet connections will keep them in touch with

their home countries. The Organising Committee in Kenya will shortly be rolling out a communications plan (including a website) to keep delegates up to date on this prestigious event.”

Contact Sanjay Gandhi at sgandhi@kurrent.co.ke for information about the OSHAfrica 2022 Conference.