



From the Guest Editor . . .



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A warm welcome to this special issue of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, featuring research papers and reports from the Southern Africa Tuberculosis and Health Systems Support (SATBHSS) project. The SATBHSS project was designed and implemented as a multi-country, multi-disciplinary, and multi-sectoral project in response to the scourge of tuberculosis (TB) and occupational lung diseases in southern Africa. The project was launched in 2016 in Maputo, Mozambique. Seven years after implementation, this special

issue showcases just a few of the project's outcomes and impacts.

The overall development objectives of the SATBHSS project were 1) to improve coverage and quality of key TB control and occupational lung disease services in targeted geographic areas of the participating countries, viz. Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia, and 2) to strengthen regional capacity to manage the burden of TB and occupational diseases.¹ The former Minister of Health in South Africa, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, once said that if TB was a snake, then the head of that snake would be in South Africa. The former United Nations General Secretary, Kofi Annan, said "*Safety and health at work is not only sound economic policy, it is a basic human right*", which was included in the 110th Session of the International Labour Conference in June 2022,² as part of the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) framework of fundamental principles and rights at work.

Before the start of the SATBHSS project, more than 500 000 men and women from South Africa and the surrounding countries were reported to be working in South Africa's mines. The incidence rate of TB was 3 000–7 000 per 100 000 population and was exacerbated by the burden of occupational lung diseases.³ Tuberculosis incidence rates were reported to be 4–7 and 3–5 times higher in Africa's and Zimbabwe's mining populations than in the general populations, respectively.^{4,5}

Some of the outcomes that the project sought to achieve were the short- and long-term capacity development of government officials; strengthened TB occupational health systems; improvement in the diagnosis and treatment of occupational lung diseases; strengthened monitoring, inspection, and enforcement skills of government officials; improvement in cross-border management of TB; improvement in private sector engagement; improvement in reporting of TB and other occupational lung disease; development and review of occupational health and safety policies, laws, regulations, and standards; and improvement of occupational health services and hygiene analysis laboratory infrastructure.

Southern African countries have come a long way in addressing TB challenges in the region. The TB incidence rate in the South African mining sector is now lower than that in the general population.⁶

The diagnosis of tuberculosis and occupational lung diseases has improved immensely. This special issue presents some of the innovative interventions implemented over the years. Four peer-reviewed research papers describe the role of the private sector in TB control; capacity development of occupational medical practitioners on the ILO International Classification of Radiographs of Pneumoconiosis; capacitation of occupational health nursing practitioners regarding basic occupational health, audiometry, and spirometry, in partnership with KuduWave; and respirable crystalline silica dust concentrations in Zambian copper mines.

The SATBHSS project was instrumental in integrating occupational health into primary healthcare, cross-border disease surveillance initiatives, and disease outbreak control and management, e.g. for COVID-19 and cholera. Other social issues that were addressed included poverty, conflicts, nutritional supplements for TB patients, and floods. The project has contributed greatly to several African Union and international development agendas such as the African Union Agenda 2063; the Africa Mining Vision; the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; the United Nations High-Level Political Declaration on Tuberculosis Agenda 2023; and the End TB Strategy 2030. Although we are progressing in the fight against TB, a lot still needs to be done on the continent, particularly, in the small-scale- and artisanal-mining sectors.

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