

MEETING ABSTRACTS**Building National Emergency Medical Teams in West Africa: Lessons Learnt and Challenges (2017-2022)**

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Background/Introduction: The World Health Organization (WHO) Emergency Medical Teams (EMT) Initiative is an important mechanism for strengthening surge capacities for clinical care during public health emergencies (PHE) in West Africa. To enhance preparedness, response capacity, and resilience, the West African Health Organization (WAHO) helps countries to establish, manage, and strengthen essential EMT capacities with other partners.

Objectives: We describe the EMT capacity-building experience in West Africa and highlight gaps and lessons learnt.

Method/Description: We conducted a descriptive, cross-sectional assessment using data from regional and national EMT awareness workshops and other activities reports. We also administrated a questionnaire to a convenient sample of

EMT stakeholders for identifying challenges and gaps in strengthening EMTs.

Results/Outcomes: A total of 14 EMT awareness workshops have been performed in West Africa resulting in on-going implementation national actions plans. Member States were at different levels of implementation of their EMT's action plan. Only one National EMT is fully operational. The main challenges in EMT implementation included lack of political will, lack of skilled workforce, lack of guidelines for developing SOPs, and inadequate funding for EMT operations. A total of 606 health workers have been trained including 492 males (80.92%). The trainees were public health specialists (44.90%), clinicians (15.80%), support staff (13.65%), and non-health actors (25.66%).

Conclusion: Our study highlighted critical challenges to guide the EMT implementation in West Africa. Despite the knowledge gained from the trainings, there is a need to take some urgent actions in West Africa for improving national EMT functionality and performance in West Africa.

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