Mobilizing youth in Africa for action on Antimicrobial Resistance through a Leadership Program

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Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a significant global threat to public health, food security and development today. In Africa, AMR has been documented to be a multisectoral problem exacerbated by a high burden of infectious diseases and weak healthcare systems. The existential COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the situation. Young people are an important and valuable stakeholder in addressing the global health threat of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) since they are the next generation of public health professionals, the potential future antimicrobial prescribers, users, stewards, and policymakers in their professional practice. In 2021, the Antimicrobial Resistance Leadership Program for tertiary students in Africa (AMRLEP) was launched by ReAct Africa in partnership with Students Against Superbugs-Africa. The program seeks to equip the students with the relevant skills, strengthen their capacity and offer them support in research, project design and management, community engagement and innovation. These students can then lead student initiatives in their respective countries and empower other students to engage in AMR. The actions can be diverse, including facilitating active engagements in AMR One Health clubs, partnering with other students to engage in research, raising AMR awareness, community engagement activities and developing innovative solutions that can help mitigate AMR among other activities.

The pilot program uses a systems approach and saw a total of more than 90 students from 8 African countries successfully complete the program that included going through an online course, sensitization sessions from expert presenters on topics that had a one health scope including among others; AMR National Action Plans, Antimicrobial Stewardship, surveillance, one health, AMR & Sustainable food systems, research and policy and soft skills which entailed topics such as design thinking and project management. The students then embarked on outreach activities after the training and during the World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) 2021. The students will continue in experiential learning in their contexts.

This is practical and sustainable model that can be replicated for a variety of health problems at sub-national, national, regional, and global levels.