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AFRICAN NEONATAL ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION NÉONATALE AFRICAINE

FIRST AFRICAN NEONATAL ASSOCIATION (ANA) CONFERENCE REPORT

***“Leading the Acceleration of Neonatal Care Improvement in Africa:
Innovations, Opportunities, and Challenges”***

 20-22 August 2025

 Park Inn by Radisson Hotel, Kigali-Rwanda

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The African Neonatal Association (ANA) Conference held from 20-22 August 2025 at Park Inn by Radisson in Kigali, Rwanda, brought together over 250 participants from 22 African countries, including neonatologists, pediatricians, nurses, researchers, policymakers, and development partners.

Under the theme ***“Leading the Acceleration of Neonatal Care Improvement in Africa: Innovations, Opportunities, and Challenges”***, the conference provided a regional platform to exchange evidence-based practices, innovations, and strategies aimed at reducing preventable neonatal deaths and improving quality of newborn care across Africa.

The three-day conference combined plenary sessions, scientific symposia, interactive panels, and poster presentations. Key discussions focused on strengthening health systems for neonatal survival, scaling up Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC), improving small and sick newborn care, and fostering regional partnerships to advance neonatal research and data-driven quality improvement.

The conference concluded with recommendations for national programs, training institutions, and professional societies to strengthen collaboration, research, and evidence-based practice in neonatal health.



INTRODUCTION

The African Neonatal Association (ANA) serves as a regional platform uniting healthcare professionals and institutions involved and committed to improving neonatal care across Africa. Recognizing persistent challenges in neonatal survival, the 2025 conference which was the first ANA physical conference since its establishment in 2021 aimed at fostering dialogue, strengthening regional collaboration, and promoting innovation and accountability in neonatal care services delivery.

This year's conference was hosted in Rwanda, a country recognized for its strong commitment to maternal and child health, recent progress in neonatal care quality improvement and reduction in its neonatal mortality. The event served as a platform for the ANA members to meet and connect physically, reflect on previous ANA activities, and build on collective efforts to align Africa's neonatal care agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP).

Objectives of the conference:

- Share country experiences, best practices and innovations in neonatal care.
- Strengthening capacity in neonatal research, data driven clinical quality improvement.
- Promote multisectoral collaboration between practitioners/professionals, policymakers, and partners.
- Identify practical solutions to accelerate progress toward reducing neonatal mortality to below 12 per 1,000 live births by 2030.



DAY ONE

Opening ceremony and Scientific Deliberations

1. Opening Ceremony



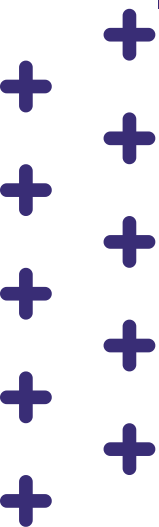
Dr. John Baptist Nkuranga
Chair of the OC

Dr. John Baptist Nkuranga, Chair of the Organizing Committee welcomed participants to Kigali, Rwanda. He expressed deep appreciation for the presence of delegates from across Africa and beyond while recognizing presence of notable invited guests, noting the honor of hosting such a distinguished gathering dedicated to advancing neonatal care on the continent.



Dr. Alex Stevenson
ANA President

In his address, **Dr. Alex Stevenson**, President of the African Neonatal Association (ANA), conveyed his delight at seeing members convene in person for the first time since the Association's establishment four years ago. He reflected on ANA's journey, emphasizing that while members had long connected virtually through online platforms, this physical meeting symbolized a renewed spirit of unity and collaboration. Dr. Stevenson underscored that "the future of humanity is literally African," adding that African professionals bear the responsibility of safeguarding that future. He commended ANA members and partners for their tireless work in hospitals, ministries, and communities "holding the ship together" and reaffirmed ANA's commitment to advancing neonatal care through shared vision and collective effort.





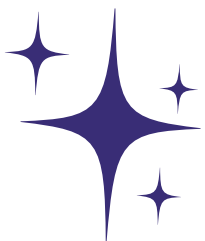
Mr. Dominic Muntanga
Deputy Repr. for
Programmes at UNICEF

Delivering the keynote address, **Mr. Dominic Muntanga**, Deputy Representative for Programmes at UNICEF Rwanda, congratulated the African Neonatal Association for its bold and visionary leadership in creating a pan-African platform to advance neonatal health. He emphasized that the ANA's mission resonates strongly with UNICEF's mandate to promote, protect, and fulfil the rights of every child. He concluded with a call to action: "Together, we can rewrite the story of newborn health in Africa."



**Dr. Athanase Rukundo, Acting Head of
Clinical and Public Health at the Ministry
of Health Rwanda**

The conference was officially opened by **Dr. Athanase Rukundo**, Acting Head of Clinical and Public Health at the Ministry of Health Rwanda, representing the Permanent Secretary. In his opening remarks, Dr. Rukundo highlighted that reducing neonatal mortality is not the responsibility of any single nation but a shared continental obligation. He called for strengthened collaboration and solidarity among African countries to ensure that every newborn survives and thrives. He further commended the African Neonatal Association for its leadership and convening power, expressing hope that the conference would inspire "action, innovation, and stronger partnerships across our continent."



2. Launch of the Journal of the African Neonatal Association

Following his address, Dr. Rukundo officiated the launch of the Journal of the African Neonatal Association (JAN) and Strategic Plan 2025–2035, a milestone aimed at promoting neonatal research across Africa and fostering evidence-based interventions to improve newborn outcomes, outcomes as well as the launch of ANA strategic plan.



The launch of JAN which has now 10 publications marked a major milestone in advancing Africa-led neonatal research, providing an open-access platform for publishing high-quality scientific evidence and clinical innovations. The unveiling of the Strategic Plan outlined ANA's ten-year vision to strengthen advocacy, research, education, and collaboration across the continent, reaffirming its commitment to ensuring that every newborn in Africa survives and thrives.

Scientific Deliberations

African Neonatal Network (ANN) Scientific Supplements: Contributions to Neonatal Research in Africa

Led by Dr. Alex Stevenson, this session highlighted the pivotal role of collaborative research across African neonatal networks in generating context-specific evidence to guide clinical practice and policy. Dr. Stevenson highlighted the importance of regional data sharing, publication of multicenter studies, and strengthening research capacity to ensure that Africa's neonatal care advancements are both evidence-based and globally recognized.

Neonatal Respiratory Diseases

Moderator: Prof. Papa Moctar Faye, President, Pediatric Society of Rwanda

This session explored advances in the management of neonatal respiratory disorders, which remain a leading cause of neonatal mortality in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

- Management of Neonatal Respiratory Problems in LMICs: **Prof. Angela Okolo** provided an in-depth overview of respiratory complications among newborns in resource-constrained settings, highlighting gaps in early detection, ventilatory support, and workforce training.
- Oxygen for Premature Infants: Challenges, Opportunities, and Innovations: **Prof. Peter Dargaville** discussed oxygen therapy in preterm infants, addressing safe oxygen delivery, monitoring, and context-appropriate innovations to improve outcomes.
- Non-invasive Measurements of Oxygenation: Principles, Caveats, and Optimal Levels: **Prof. Christian Poet** elaborated on the technical and physiological aspects of oxygen saturation monitoring, emphasizing accuracy, calibration, and evidence-based targets.

The session concluded with an engaging discussion on the need for capacity-building in neonatal respiratory management, technology adaptation, and local protocol development.

Causes of Neonatal Death

Moderators: Prof. Eliane Kuissi

This session presented a broad overview of neonatal mortality patterns across Africa and potential solutions to reduce preventable deaths.

- **Prof. Ebunoluwa Adejuyigbe** shared insights on Neonatal Mortality in Africa: Current Situation and Strategies to Improve, calling for stronger data systems and accountability mechanisms.
- **Dr. Gugu Kali** presented on Management of Hypoxic Ischemic Encephalopathy (HIE) in Africa, underlining challenges in access to therapeutic hypothermia and neurodevelopmental follow-up.
- **Dr. Nikita Jethwa** compared Ultrasound and MRI in HIE, demonstrating how imaging modalities can complement clinical diagnosis and guide management.
- **Prof. Papa M. Faye** discussed Management of Prematurity in Developing Countries, focusing on policy, service delivery, and community-level interventions.
- **Dr. Firdose Nakwa** presented on Ultrasound in Intraventricular Hemorrhage (IVH), illustrating practical applications for early detection and monitoring.

Discussions emphasized on harmonizing clinical protocols, strengthening referral systems, and investing in training for neonatal imaging and intensive care.

Roundtable discussion: Neonatal Sepsis

Moderator: Dr. Assumpta Umwali

This interactive roundtable brought together experts to address neonatal sepsis a persistent challenge in African neonatal units.

- **Prof. A. Dramowski** presented findings from the INSIGHTS Study, examining antimicrobial use, diagnostics, and guideline adherence across sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Dr. Sandi Holgate** discussed Challenges and Solutions in Diagnosis and Treatment, emphasizing timely blood culture and antibiotic stewardship.
- **Dr. Alex Stevenson** shared perspectives on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) in neonatal units, identifying structural gaps and proposing practical IPC packages adaptable to African contexts.

Participants agreed on the urgent need for standardized sepsis protocols, regional antimicrobial resistance (AMR) monitoring, and capacity-building in laboratory diagnostics.

Nutrition and Prematurity

Moderators: Prof. Karim Manji and Dr. Martha Mkony

This session examined the intersection between nutrition and prematurity, highlighting evidence-based approaches for improving survival and long-term growth.

- **Dr. Muneerah Satardien** discussed Optimizing Growth in African Preterm Infants, emphasizing the role of breastmilk fortification.
- **Dr. Emily Njuguna** presented A Comprehensive Model for Newborn Nutrition, integrating facility- and community-level approaches.
- **Dr. Victoria Nakibuuka** shared the Ugandan Experience with Milk Banking, showcasing its impact on neonatal nutrition and survival.
- **Mr. Kateregga Bazilio** represented the Preterm Infants Parents Network of Uganda, providing valuable parental insights on sustaining breastmilk feeding and family support systems.

Discussions reinforced the importance of human milk, fortification strategies, and advocacy for milk banking across African countries.

Poster Presentations and Young Researchers' Forum

Over 20 posters were presented by young researchers and postgraduate trainees. Topics ranged from innovations in neonatal care and data quality improvement to maternal-newborn linkages. Participants highlighted the value of mentorship and the importance of nurturing future neonatal leaders through structured research training.

Partner Engagement and Exhibition Booths

Partners including FISCHER AND PAYKEL, PICTERUS, ETHYPHARM Ethypharm, NEST360, Fisher & Paykel Healthcare, Path, Vayu Foundation, Goal 3 showcased tools and innovations supporting newborn health. Exhibits included neonatal resuscitation devices, data management platforms, and educational models. The exhibition fostered cross-learning and partnership opportunities between academia, government institutions, and the private sector.

DAY TWO

Research, Innovation, and Collaboration

Session: Neonatal Research in Africa

Moderators: Prof. Papa Moctar Faye and Dr. Naana Wireko Brooby

Prof. Joy Lawn delivered a keynote on The Future of Neonatal Research in Africa, highlighting the continent's unique opportunity to drive evidence-based change.

- **Prof. Chinyere Ezeaka** presented Technology Innovations for Quality Newborn Care in LMICs: The NEST360 Program, detailing scalable solutions for monitoring and treatment.
- **Prof. Clement Ezechukwu** and **Dr. Franck Houndjahoue** introduced the Journal of African Neonatology (JAN), emphasizing the need for African-led research dissemination.

Symposium 1: Ethypharm: Bridging the Gap in Caffeine Citrate Use in Neonatal Care

Moderators: Prof. Solange Ouedraogo and Dr. Martha Mkony

The symposium focused on caffeine therapy in the management of apnea of prematurity.

- **Prof. Christian Poet** delivered the keynote on Latest Updates in Management of Apnea of Prematurity, followed by expert contributions from Drs. Olufunke Bolaji, Mahlet Abayneh, Kunda Mutesu, Alex Stevenson, John Baptist Nkuranga, Alhassan Abdul-Mumin, Audrey Chepkemoi, Victoria, and Rehema Marado.
- **Dr. Reuben Sigei** discussed Ethypharm Collaboration Experiences in neonatal care, while Mr. Robert Bruchet provided closing remarks acknowledging the partnership between ANA and Ethypharm.

Oral Communications Sessions

Parallel oral sessions featured diverse neonatal topics:

- **Room I (OC1–OC11):** Essential Care of the Newborn: Moderated by Prof. Karim Manji and Prof. Ouro Tchagbele.
- **Room II (OC12–OC21):** Neonatal Morbidity and Mortality: Moderated by Prof. Angela Dramowski and Prof. Eliane Kuissi.
- **Room I (OC22–OC29):** Respiratory Care for Newborns: Moderated by Prof. L. Cisse and Prof. Angela Okolo.

Room II (OC30–OC40): Infection and Nutrition: Moderated by Prof. Chinyere Ezeaka and Prof. Eliane Kuissi.

Each session encouraged regional data sharing, innovative interventions, and translational research to inform better, adaptive and sustainable improvement in neonatal outcomes.

Collaborations Hour: ANA and Partners

A dedicated hour featured strategic discussions between ANA, PANSAA, ANN, NEOTREE, and the CHIESI Foundation, exploring ways to harmonize efforts, share data, and strengthen newborn care networks across Africa.

Symposium 2: The Future of Neonatal Follow-Up in Africa

Moderators: Prof. Papa Moctar Faye and Dr. Alex Stevenson

Speakers: Dr. Samudragupta Bora, Dr. Judith Cosmas, Dr. John Baptist Nkuranga, and Ms. Pamela Henderson

This symposium highlighted approaches to follow-up care for small and sick newborns, including developmental screening, parental education, and multidisciplinary support models.

Dinner and Award Ceremony

The evening concluded with an award dinner celebrating excellence in neonatal care research and collaboration. The event honored outstanding researchers, fellows, and institutional partners advancing neonatal health across Africa.

The **CHIESI Foundation** received recognition as Outstanding Partner, while **ETHYPHARM** and **NEST360** were awarded as Gold Sponsors for their strong commitment to neonatal innovation. ANA Conference Sponsors **Fisher and Paykel**, **GOAL 3**, **PATH**, **Picterus**, and **Vayu Global Health** were also acknowledged for their vital support.

Individual awards recognized excellence in research, including Best Oral Presenter, Best Early Career Presenter in Africa, Best Poster Presenter, and Best Upcoming Researcher in Africa, highlighting the growing leadership and innovation driving neonatal care across the continent.

DAY THREE

Closing Plenary and General Assembly

Round Table discussion

Using Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) as a Vehicle for Strengthening Small and Sick Newborn Care in Africa

Moderators: Prof. Ebunoluwa Adejuyigbe and Dr. Sonia Bandeira

Speakers: Prof. Chellani Harish, Dr. Suman Rao, Dr. Kondwani, and Dr. Siren Rettadel.

The session emphasized KMC as an evidence-based intervention for preterm and low-birth-weight infants, promoting integration of KMC into health systems to strengthen holistic newborn care.

ANA General Assembly

The General Assembly marked the administrative conclusion of the congress.

- **Financial Report:** Dr. John Baptist Nkuranga, ANA Treasurer, presented the ANA financial report outlining achievements, expenditures, and financial growth over the past four years.
- **Election of the New Executive Committee:** The new Executive Committee, composed of dedicated and capable leaders, will advance ANA over the next four years and includes the following members:



New Executive Committee Members



Dr Olufunke Bolaji
Secretary General



Dr John Baptist Nkuranga
President



Prof Mactar Faye
Vice President



Dr Mahlet Abayneh
Chair, Education Committee



Dr Franck Houndjahoue
Treasurer



Dr Martha Mkony
Chair, Advocacy and
Collaboration Committee



Dr Sonia Bandeira
Portuguese Lead



Prof Odile Ouedraogo Solange
Chair, Research and Scientific
Committee



Dr Alexander Stevenson
Ex-Officio



In his farewell address, outgoing President Dr. Alex Stevenson expressed gratitude to members for their commitment, highlighting the transformative journey of ANA since its inception.

President-elect Dr. John Baptist Nkuranga called for unity, engagement, and shared responsibility to continue advancing improvement in neonatal care across Africa.

Key Outcomes and Recommendations

1. Outcomes

- Strengthened regional collaboration among neonatal care professionals and stakeholders who participated in the conference.
- Became a proof of concept that regional neonatal care professionals are capable and timely to take the lead in discussions, practices, interventions or innovations and research required to sustainably contribute to reduction of preventable causes of neonatal mortality and morbidity
- Renewed partner commitments and call to action to end preventable neonatal death in the regional.
- Consensus on integrating quality improvement into national neonatal care programs as was demonstrated by evidence presented through the work of African Neonatal Network (ANN).

2. Recommendations

For Ministries of Health

- Institutionalize neonatal quality improvement collaborations at national and subnational levels.
- Ensure equitable access to essential neonatal care equipment and supplies.
- Integrate KMC and small and sick newborn care packages into essential national health service packages.
- Mobilize and avail necessary resources, human and infrastructure required to advance optimal neonatal care across the region.

For Health Facilities and Training Institutions

- Embed mentorship and continuous professional development in neonatal units.
- Adopt data-driven decision-making and routine audits.
- Strengthen neonatal nursing and medical fellowship programs.

For Partners and Professional Networks

- Support innovation, implementation research, and data-sharing platforms.
- Align technical and financial support with national strategies.
- Support promotion south–south collaboration and cross-learning.

For the African Neonatal Association

- Build on the momentum to lead neonatal care transformative agenda through such regional scientific agenda and technical working groups.
- Continue convening annual assemblies
- Develop a regional research agenda focusing on key regional neonatal challenges.
- Lead regional health workforce development for neonatal care through harmonized curriculum, shared resources and expertise etc.
- Advocate for sustained investment in neonatal health at continental level.

Conclusion

The ANA 2025 Scientific Congress represented a landmark moment for neonatal health in Africa. Through evidence-driven discussions, innovation presentations, and strengthened partnerships, the congress reaffirmed collective commitment to ensure every newborn in Africa survives and thrives.

Our partners



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Thank
You!

