Panelists’ biographies

Professor Akin Abayomi
Honorable Commissioner for Health of Lagos State, Nigeria

Professor Akin Abayomi is a specialist in internal medicine, haematology-oncology, biosecurity and environmental health. He received his first degree in Medicine at the Royal Medical College of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital at the University of London, with fellowship from both Royal College of Medicine and Pathology in the United Kingdom and the College of Medicine of South Africa.

His focus has been mainly on the concept of emerging infectious diseases and the development of diagnostic and clinical capacity in Africa.

Professor Abayomi was Chief Pathologist and Head of the Division of Haematology at the University of Stellenbosch’s Faculty of Medicine Science in 2009 in Cape Town, South Africa. Prior to that, he was a consultant at the University of West Indies and the University of Zimbabwe. He has been exposed to a vast variety of geographical variations and disease patterns within the field of internal medicine, having worked in diverse countries of the world. Professor Abayomi is a fellow of the African Academy of Science.

Professor Abayomi is the Founder of the Global Emerging Pathogen Consortium also known as GET, which was entrenched at the peak of the Ebola outbreak to address Biosecurity concerns in Africa. He is a member of the Board and Honorary Professor to the Center for Biosecurity Studies at the University of the West Indies in Barbados as well as a Professor of Medicine at the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research in Lagos, Nigeria.

He is a consultant to the West Africa Health Organisation (WAHO) Biosecurity and Biobanking framework to service the ECOWAS member. Professor Akin Abayomi is now the Honourable Commissioner for Health in Lagos State, Nigeria, under the administration of Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu.
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9 November 2021

Bruce Gellin

Chief of Global Public Health Strategy of The Rockefeller Foundation

Bruce Gellin, MD, MPH, is the Chief of Global Public Health Strategy at The Rockefeller Foundation. In this role, he leads the Global Vaccination Initiative to improve equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines and serves as a key member of the Foundation’s pandemic prevention Institute that aims to avert future pandemics by identifying and responding to the earliest alerts of a disease outbreak.

Dr. Gellin has held numerous positions leading and advising on global immunization, strategic policy development, and pandemic preparedness and response at national, multinational, non-governmental, and institutional organizations and entities including the Sabin Vaccine Institute, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), World Health Organization (WHO), National Network for Immunization Information, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, and Georgetown University School of Medicine.

Dr. Gellin is a graduate of the University of North Carolina (Morehead Scholar), Cornell University Medical College, and the Columbia University School of Public Health. He has written extensively about public health aspects of infectious diseases in medical and non-medical texts and the peer-reviewed medical literature and also served as a medical advisor to Encyclopedia Britannica.
Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu
Archbishop, Province of the Church of Uganda

The Most Rev. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu was elected 9th Archbishop of the Church of Uganda on 28th August 2019 and was enthroned as Archbishop on 1st March 2020 in St. Paul’s Cathedral, Namirembe, Kampala. Archbishop Kaziimba was consecrated Bishop on 26th October 2008 and served as the Bishop of Mityana Diocese for almost eleven years.

Archbishop Kaziimba did his diploma and undergraduate degree in theology from Uganda Christian University, Mukono, and received his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan (USA).

At the time of his election, in addition to his responsibilities as a diocesan Bishop, Archbishop Kaziimba had served as the Chairman of the Provincial Board of Household and Community Transformation, as well as the Chair of the Board of Trustees for Ndejje University, Chair of the Committee for HIV and Public Health for the Interreligious Council of Uganda, and Chair of Words of Hope Uganda Radio Ministry.

About his calling, Archbishop Kaziimba says, “Since I have known Christ, I want Him to be known by word and life in the power of the Holy Spirit.” He has a passion for empowering others and developing the church, a subject he has written about in his 2015 book, ‘Empowering the Laity’, published by Words of Hope, Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA).
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Ricardo Mena

Director of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

Ricardo Mena has served in the United Nations system since 1993, occupying positions in the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Department of Management and with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). In 2009, Mr. Mena joined UNDRR as head of its Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean based in Panama. In 2017, he took on the position of UNDRR Chief of Branch in charge of Supporting and Monitoring the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction based in Geneva. He served as Director ad interim of the organization from December 2019 to May 2020 and was appointed as Director on 1 June 2020.

Mr. Mena has ample experience in all the facets of disaster risk reduction and its links with sustainable development, climate change and humanitarian crisis. He led 16 UN disaster relief missions, worked extensively in disaster preparedness and recovery, coordinated the implementation of national disaster mitigation projects in various countries and led the formulation of a preparatory assistance for the development of a disaster mitigation strategy for Latin America. He led the establishment of the Business Continuity Management Unit at the UN Headquarters and oversaw the implementation of the corporate Avian Flu Preparedness Plan in New York and offices away from Headquarters. Prior to his engagement with the United Nations, Mr. Mena held managerial positions in the private sector in Ecuador and worked with the organization Partners of the Americas as Deputy Director of an emergency preparedness program for Ecuador and neighbouring countries. Mr. Mena holds a master’s degree in Risk, Crisis and Disaster Management from the University of Leicester, United Kingdom.
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Allison Neale

Allison Neale, Vice President, Public Policy, Henry Schein, Inc.

Allison has worked in global health, corporate social responsibility and human rights for more than two decades. As Vice President of Public Policy, Allison leads Henry Schein’s public policy and public health engagement by partnering with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and industry groups.

Allison co-directs Henry Schein’s engagement as private sector lead of the Pandemic Supply Chain Network, a partnership founded in 2015 to strengthen the healthcare supply chain and includes the WHO, other intergovernmental organizations and 60 companies. Allison leads Henry Schein’s engagement in private sector global health initiatives, including: Global Health Security Agenda Private Sector Roundtable (where she serves as Advocacy Chairwoman), CDC Corporate Roundtable, HHS Supply Chain Taskforce Steering Committee and engagements with the World Economic Forum.

Allison serves as Chairwoman of the Gold Foundation Corporate Council and leads the company’s engagement with the UN Global Humanitarian Action Executive Alliance. She co-founded the Alpha Omega-Henry Schein Cares Holocaust Survivor Oral Health Program, which has provided free care to 1,800 survivors in need.

Allison received her Master’s in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School, where she was awarded the Pforzheimer Fellowship and met her husband Chris. They live in NYC with their daughter and son.
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Steven Taylor
Clinical Psychologist, University of British Columbia
Steven Taylor is a Professor and Clinical Psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Dr. Taylor’s work focuses on anxiety disorders and on the psychology of pandemics. He has authored over 300 scientific publications and more than 20 books, which have been translated into many languages. His most recent book, published a few weeks before the outbreak of COVID-19, is ‘The psychology of pandemics: Preparing for the next global outbreak of infectious disease’. Dr. Taylor is a member of the Canadian federal government’s expert panel on COVID-19.

Dr Renee Wegrzyn
Vice President of Business Development at Ginkgo Bioworks
Dr. Renee Wegrzyn is a Vice President of Business Development at Ginkgo Bioworks where she is currently focused on applying synthetic biology to outpace infectious disease – including COVID-19 – through biomanufacturing, vaccine, and diagnostic/biosurveillance innovation. Prior to Ginkgo, she was Program Manager in the Biological Technologies Office (BTO) of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), where she leveraged the tools of synthetic biology and gene editing to enhance biosecurity, support the domestic bioeconomy, and thwart biothreats. Her DARPA portfolio included the Living Foundries: 1000 Molecules, Safe Genes, Preemptive Expression of Protective Alleles and Response Elements (PREPARE) and Detect it with Gene Editing (DIGET) programs. Renee currently serves on the Scientific Advisory Boards for the National Academies of Science Board on Army Research and Development, Revive & Restore, Air Force Research Labs, Nuclear Threat Initiative, and the Innovative Genomics Institute. Prior to joining DARPA as a PM, she led teams in the private industry in the areas of biosecurity, gene therapies, emerging infectious disease, neuromodulation, synthetic biology, and diagnostics. Renee holds a PhD and BS in Applied Biology from the Georgia Institute of Technology, was a Fellow in the Center for Health Security Emerging Leaders in Biosecurity Initiative (ELBI), and completed her postdoctoral training as an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow in Heidelberg, Germany.