

Executive Summary

On 23rd March 2021, the Medical Women Association of Nigeria hosted the 9th Congress of the Near East and Africa Region (NEAR) Congress, with focus on issues and ways to advance universal health coverage (UHC) across the region. The Congress drew participants from all over the world with the sub-continent adequately represented. Well, over 400 people attended the 3-day event, which held at the International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria.

On hand to declare open the Congress was Nigeria's Minister of Health, Dr Osagie Ehanire, who gave the opening remarks and accompanied by the Minister of Women Affairs, Dame Pauline Tallen and Chairmen Senate and House Committees on Health, as well as a host of other dignitaries within and outside Nigeria.

The keynote speaker was Dr Grange, Former Minister of Health, during President Olusegun Obasanjo regime. Dr Grange spoke on the theme of the Congress designed to address and advance UHC in the NEAR.

During the Conference, which adopted a hybrid nature where physical and virtual attendees graced and lasted for 3 days, a number of plenary sessions, symposia and breakout oral and poster abstract presentations were conducted. A pre-Congress webinar session was held before the start of the Congress meeting.

Conference participants had the opportunity to navigate and choose sessions that they had interests in. The main theme of the Congress was 'Accelerating Universal Health Coverage: Priorities, Opportunities and Challenges', while the sub-themes that informed the three plenary sessions focussed on the 'Status of Universal Health Coverage in the Region, Critical Healthcare needs and Services for Vulnerable Groups, especially women and children, and Actions to Advance Universal Health Coverage'. Plenary sessions lasted for about 2 h, while about 30–60 min was spent on each symposium of breakout sessions as applicable and based on the agenda for the event. At the beginning of each session, speakers, panellists, rapporteurs and the background information about the subject matter or topic for discussion were presented to the participants. Thereafter, a structured process of comments, questions and answers, brainstorming, exchange of information and in-depth discussions ensued.

At the end of each session, the way forward and far-reaching recommendations were made based on the discussions and consensus reached by participants in some instances. Lessons learnt, successes recorded and related constraints, bottle-necks and/or barriers to attaining UHC were obtained and documented.

The 3-day Congress came to an end on 26th March 2021, with a communique detailing resolutions reached issued.