

Heidelberg University Institute of Global Health Alumni Workshop Report

“Empowering Global Health Alumni to Address Anthropocene Challenges”

In memory of the late Prof. Dr. Andreas Ruppel, formerly of the Heidelberg University Institute of Global Health (HIGH), twenty-three alumni and faculty members from HIGH met in Heidelberg, Germany from the 4th to the 8th of September 2024 for a commemoration workshop on the Anthropocene—an era defined by significant environmental changes due to human activities, especially arising from the Industrial Revolution. The alumni were drawn from 23 countries in Africa, South East Asia, South America, Middle East and United States of America, representing the alumni’s diverse current professional work and completion years of the MSc in International Health.

Together, they participated in a five-day international alumni workshop funded by the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD) and facilitated by Dr. Andreas Deckert, Rupal Shah-Rohlf, Dr. Sylvia Sax, and Dr. Peter Dambach to discuss the problems caused by the Anthropocene, present and future challenges, and possible solutions. The primary goal of the workshop was to educate and empower the HIGH alumni to tackle the pressing environmental and public health issues arising from the Anthropocene.

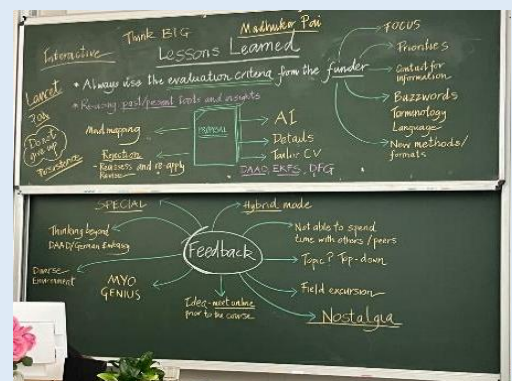


The workshop provided valuable knowledge on the Anthropocene and its broad impacts on both the environment and public health as discussed by the alumni, the HIGH faculty members, an expert speaker and a representative from the DAAD. The insights gained, coupled with enhanced proposal writing and fundraising skills, empowered the participants to take actionable steps toward addressing the challenges created by the Anthropocene in their respective countries, regions or

workplaces. The alumni now possess the tools to design, propose, and implement projects that contribute to sustainable development and public health resilience.

The participants made individual presentations on PowerPoint or posters to discuss their work and proposed solutions to the challenges created by the Anthropocene in their home country or professional area.

From these presentations, the participants were divided into 5 groups, each of which was tasked with identifying a compelling problem discussed during the workshop, develop a proposal that aligns with the aims of the workshop and the lessons learned about the Anthropocene. The aim of developing these



presentations and subsequent group/team work was to prepare each group to develop a proposal of good enough quality to be funded, then a group member from the target country to seek funding from the DAAD or the German Embassy in their countries to implement the proposed project to mitigate the impacts on the Anthropocene on vulnerable communities in the target country. At the end of the workshop, five proposals were developed by the participants in their groups. The five proposals developed by the groups—ranging from enhancing One Health and AMR collaboration in Southeast Asia, to raising



climate change awareness in Nepal, exploring plastic waste transformation in China, and Social Justice in times of Climate Change: a bridge between technologies—underwent peer review for constructive critique and improvement. The proposals are expected to be submitted to the DAAD or German Embassy in the respective target countries for consideration for the small-project funding option. If funded, these projects would not only benefit the targeted population, but would also be in line with the workshop’s aims to address the challenges brought about by the Anthropocene that impact various vulnerable populations.

A final reflection from this great team after five days of collaborative work on the Anthropocene and climate change: “It is not possible for one to change the world but one can raise collective awareness to make that happen. History shows that this is possible. Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela made it”.

Lessons Learned from the Workshop

- **Understanding of Anthropocene Impacts:**
The workshop deepened participants' knowledge of the Anthropocene, particularly in how human activities have dramatically affected both the environment and public health. Environmental degradation directly and indirectly affects public health. Air and water pollution contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, while climate change fuels the spread of infectious diseases by altering ecosystems and expanding the range of disease vectors like mosquitoes. Extreme weather events such as floods and heatwaves increase mortality rates, disrupt healthcare systems, and threaten food security.

- **Global Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:**
The diverse backgrounds of the alumni, spanning across various continents and professional fields, enabled a rich exchange of ideas. This highlighted the need for global collaboration to tackle environmental challenges that transcend national boundaries.
- **Skill Development in Project Proposals:**
The participants gained valuable skills in project proposal writing and fundraising. This empowerment is crucial for enabling alumni to seek funding for initiatives that address Anthropocene-related challenges in their home countries or regions.
- **Practical Solutions and Adaptation of local setting:**
By focusing on developing solutions tailored to specific regional challenges, the workshop encouraged the alumni to consider both global and local dimensions of the Anthropocene's effects. This approach underlined the importance of context-sensitive interventions in addressing public health and environmental issues.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach to Problem-Solving:**
The mix of alumni from health, environmental sciences, and other sectors reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing Anthropocene challenges. This holistic approach ensures that solutions consider not just public health, but also economic, social, and environmental factors.

The Way Forward

- **Implementation of Group Proposals:**
The five project proposals developed during the workshop should be finalized and submitted to potential funders, such as DAAD or the German Embassies in the respective countries. If funded, these projects will serve as pilot initiatives to mitigate the Anthropocene's impacts on vulnerable communities.
- **Continuous Alumni Engagement:**
Maintaining the momentum from the workshop through alumni networks and periodic follow-up events can ensure sustained collaboration. Alumni should be encouraged to share progress, challenges, and success stories as they implement their respective projects.
- **Expanding Project Funding and Support:**
Alumni and faculty should explore additional funding opportunities beyond DAAD, such as partnerships with NGOs, international organizations, or private sector sponsors. This will increase the scope and impact of the projects developed.
- **Leveraging Skills in Broader Advocacy:**
The alumni are now equipped to serve as advocates for addressing Anthropocene-related public health issues in their respective regions. They should engage with policymakers, educators, and communities to raise awareness and drive initiatives that promote sustainability and resilience.

The learnings of the workshop will enable the alumni to translate their new knowledge and skills into tangible actions that address both local and global challenges of the Anthropocene and advocate for positive change in the various forum of the respective regions.