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CAPSTONE

Non-Communicable Diseases
Collaboration in West Africa

CAPacity Strengthening of Transdisciplinary education for nON-communicable disease care in WEST Africa (CAPSTONE)

Report of the CAPSTONE's Second Community of Practice Webinar

5th May 2026



Background

The CAPSTONE Community of Practice (CoP) Webinar was convened virtually on the 5th May, 2026, to bring together stakeholders from academia, healthcare institutions, government agencies, professional bodies, civil society organisations, and partner institutions engaged in non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention and control. Attendees ranged from NCD regional coordinators and dietitians to public health researchers, environmental health officers, and students, reflecting the broad and transdisciplinary nature of CAPSTONE's approach to capacity strengthening. The meeting aimed to reflect on the progress of the CAPSTONE Project, share experiences from implementing NCD-focused short courses, review the Community of Practice framework and sustainability strategies, and explore opportunities to strengthen collaboration and knowledge translation across Ghana, The Gambia, and the wider sub-Saharan African region. The event was chaired by Prof. Paul Amuna.

Chairperson's Opening Remarks

Prof. Paul Amuna, Team Lead, UHAS, and a recognised champion of challenge-based learning (CBL), set the tone for the session. He reminded participants of the epidemiological and demographic shifts facing West Africa and the urgency of building a durable, home-grown capacity to address non-communicable diseases. He stressed the importance of thinking beyond project timelines, calling for the CoP to evolve into an advocacy group, a research network, and a resource for health system training, rather than merely a complement to short courses.

"We want to think beyond projects. We want to establish a platform and an advocacy group that actually thinks in terms of research, programmes, and how we can support our health systems in terms of training and building capacity."

Prof. Amuna highlighted the government's recognition of NCDs as a healthcare priority in Ghana, the establishment of the Medical Trust Foundation, and the launch of a primary healthcare programme, all of which create a supportive policy environment for the community's work. He also pointed to the over-subscription of recent short courses as evidence of strong national and regional demand, and issued a challenge to develop a newsletter, expand the project website, and work toward an annual NCD conference.

Progress on the CAPSTONE Project & NCD Short Courses

Dr. Daniel Boateng (KNUST) presented an overview of the CAPSTONE project's aims and achievements to date. CAPSTONE was established to develop and implement transdisciplinary, challenge-based curricula to strengthen the healthcare workforce's capacity to address NCDs across West Africa. Working across the University of Ghana (UG), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), and the University of The Gambia, the project has now piloted all six specialist short courses:

The Six CAPSTONE Short Courses

- Epidemiology, Prevention & Surveillance of NCDs
- NCD Management
- Digital Health & NCDs
- Health Financing & Economic Evaluation
- Implementation Science

- Surveillance for NCDs

Each course has been piloted at least one round across institutions, with iterative refinement guided by stakeholder and participant feedback. Demand has consistently exceeded capacity, as one recent course attracted over 700 applications and had to adopt a blended delivery model. Applications have come in from Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria, and other African countries that were not originally part of the implementing consortium, signalling the programme's growing continental reach.

A key milestone highlighted by Dr. Boateng is the forthcoming accredited MPH programme with NCD specialisation at UHAS, which has already received Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GtEC) accreditation and has opened its application portal. A similar MPH is planned for The Gambia. The project is on track to meet its target of each implementing institution completing three rounds of short-course pilots before the project closes in December.

Challenge-Based Learning: The Heart of the Approach

Both Dr. Boateng and Prof. Amuna underscored that the challenge-based learning (CBL) methodology introduced in partnership with Utrecht University has been transformative. Participants praised the approach for fostering real investigation, cross-disciplinary dialogue, and meaningful solution development, rather than passive learning. Faculty members noted that in several instances, participants produced insights that surpassed what the teaching team had anticipated.

"The best group in our training last week was an online group, not those who were in the room. It tells us that the hybrid approach actually works — and that a well-crafted programme, with committed participants, delivers very good impact."

CoP Framework and Sustainability: Looking Beyond the Project

Prof. Arti Singh (KNUST) presented the CoP's evolution and sustainability strategy. She described how the community has grown to include ministries, government agencies, civil society organisations, academic institutions, research bodies, student associations, and media all engaged at different points in the curriculum development and piloting process.

Key reflections from two and a half years of community engagement included the importance of clear differentiation from existing programmes, the need to align course content with national NCD policy priorities (including health economics, which policymakers increasingly demand), and the value of diverse, multi-sector stakeholder involvement in shaping and refining the curriculum.

Sustainability Pathways Identified

- ⇒ Integration of short courses into the new accredited MPH programmes at UHAS and the University of The Gambia
- ⇒ Embedding CPD-accredited courses within existing institutional programmes
- ⇒ Partnerships with the MasterCard Foundation African Health Collaborative and the NCD Alliance
- ⇒ Exploring cost-recovery models with nominal participant fees
- ⇒ Incorporating the CoP into ongoing and future research projects within the NCD space
- ⇒ Maintaining the online presence via the CAPSTONE website and social media

⇒ Developing a dedicated newsletter for the network

Plenary Discussion: Widening the Circle

The Q&A session generated a rich, wide-ranging discussion. Several key themes emerged:

- **Inclusive professional representation.** Participants raised the need to explicitly recognise dietitians, nutritionists, medical laboratory scientists, medical imaging professionals, and environmental health officers as distinct and essential members of the NCD workforce rather than grouping all allied health professionals under a single category. Facilitators agreed, noting that participants from medical laboratory sciences had already joined recent courses and that climate and air quality experts would be increasingly relevant to the NCD agenda.
- **Scaling up reach.** Participants suggested that placing short course content on open online platforms with assessments and certification could dramatically increase reach, given that even the current over-subscribed cohorts represent a tiny fraction of Ghana's healthcare workforce.
- **Nurturing innovations from the courses.** One participant described how her cohort had developed a digital app during the Digital Health & NCDs course and asked how such outputs could be supported to reach the public. The faculty acknowledged this as a gap and invited participants to engage directly with course facilitators to explore grant applications and further development pathways.
- **Training NCD Champions.** One participant drew an analogy with HIV care peer champion models, suggesting that people living with NCDs who had gained mastery in self-managing their conditions could be trained to support patients in clinics. The idea was warmly received and flagged for consideration within future iterations of the community's work.
- **Pathways for PhD and international students.** Questions arose about whether participants from other African countries could access the MPH programme and whether PhD opportunities existed within the CAPSTONE network. PhD studies, while not directly funded by the current project, are possible, and the faculty expressed interest in supporting participants who had completed multiple short courses to pursue advanced research.

Institutional Experience: Knowledge Sharing at Korle Bu

Samuel Success Hanyor, a Senior Dietitian at Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, shared a compelling account of how participation in the CAPSTONE NCD Epidemiology short course at UG in September 2025 directly shaped practice at his institution. On 27 February, he and his colleague organised an internal knowledge-sharing session for nutrition and dietetics staff and students, introducing them to the CAPSTONE project, the epidemiological trends covered in the course, and the principles of challenge-based learning.

The session sparked a departmental discussion on strengthening research, expanding patient education beyond hospital walls into communities, notably the development of standards of practice for managing key NCD conditions, a process that is now being championed by the department head. He acknowledged the challenge of condensing a week's worth of intensive learning into a single session and the difficulty of achieving the full multidisciplinary mix of the original course. Nevertheless, the initiative has catalysed ongoing research interests among his colleagues, and a follow-up session planned to include virtual participation from CAPSTONE faculty is already in preparation.

"After the programme, it reshaped how I came back to Korle Bu to practise. My eyes were opened to several aspects of NCD care that I had not fully considered before."

Key Reflections: Knowledge Translation in Practice

Prof. Kwame Bonsafo, Member of UG team, affirmed the importance of continuing the community of practice as the primary mechanism for sustained engagement beyond the project. He emphasised mentorship, co-creation, and the collective responsibility of all participants, in academia, clinical practice, and public health, to ensure that CAPSTONE's outcomes endure. He also noted that faculty across the consortium remain available to support participants interested in PhD supervision within the NCD space.

Mr. Labram Musah, National Coordinator of the NCD Alliance Ghana, offered a civil society perspective. He applauded CAPSTONE's deliberate inclusion of civil society in its governance and curriculum processes, describing it as a mark of the project's maturity and alignment with principles of inclusive policy development. He called for greater attention to the *commercial determinants of health* including industry marketing and taxation on unhealthy commodities, as structural levers that the community should advocate for, and challenged the consortium to ensure that its outputs are translated into tangible policy change, not just professional discourse.

"It goes beyond just talking about how to prevent NCDs. We must translate what we do here into action — ensuring that advocacy, taxation policy, and the reduction of aggressive industry marketing are part of what this community champions."

Closing Remarks and the Path Forward

In closing the session, Prof. Paul Amuna and Dr. Daniel Boateng distilled the day's themes into a clear direction of travel. The community of practice is not an end-point but a living platform, one that will grow organically alongside the MPH programmes, adapt to new learners and contexts, and serve as a resource for the broader health system.

Next Steps Announced

- ⇒ Regular webinars and quarterly seminars bringing in expert speakers on NCD topics
- ⇒ Development and distribution of a CAPSTONE community newsletter
- ⇒ Revamp and ongoing maintenance of the project website (capstonewestafrica.org)
- ⇒ Recording and packaging of key training sessions for online access
- ⇒ Exploration of special interest groups within the CoP (advocacy, research, training)
- ⇒ Development of a comprehensive NCD training manual for sharing with the Ministry of Health and the Ghana Health Service
- ⇒ Planning toward an annual NCD conference convened by the community
- ⇒ Continued outreach to expand the WhatsApp community and social media presence

The session concluded with a group photo moment, a fitting symbol of the community spirit that has defined CAPSTONE's journey. As Prof. Amuna reminded participants, challenge-based learning and a community of practice are both, at their core, about working collaboratively to build a movement. The second CoP webinar made clear that this movement is very much alive.

