



Celebrating an International Nigerian One Health Living Legend Professor Oyewale Tomori at Seventy-Seven

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Abstract

Professor Oyewale Tomori is a multiple-award-winning specialist in human, zoonotic and veterinary viruses including the polio-myelitis virus. Since graduating forty-six years as a Veterinary Doctor from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, in 1971, he joined the Rockefeller funded Arbovirus unit, Virology Department, College of Medicine/University College Hospital, University of Ibadan where he acquired a PhD in Virology. According to Professor Oyewale Tomori, pioneer One Health activities in Nigeria could be traced back to academic and research activities at the Rockefeller-funded Arbovirus unit, Virology Department, College of Medicine/University College Hospital, University of Ibadan in 1969, soon after the outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria.

After graduation, the One Health Nigeria Living Legend, Oyewale Tomori, has combined his training as a veterinarian and a public health virologist to use science to benefit society, improve disease diagnosis, and prevent untold human suffering in many African countries.

When the spirit of One Health was reinvigorated in the eighties, the One Health Initiative (still is) promoting worldwide, Professor Oyewale Tomori was the first Nigerian (the author was the second) to sign up as a supporter and promoter of One Health Initiative in 2008.

He represents the concepts, perceptions, practices, principle and existential purpose of One Health. Prior and since then he continues to be still actively involved in One Health promotion activities in Nigeria. One of his most passionate was his August 25, 2008 declaration: Polio Eradication-A Battle I fought with undiluted passion, says Professor Oyewale Tomori, a major player who made this feat possible; and ending the article with the declaration "Truly, the joy of seeing Africa Polio-free has drastically reduced my age and I feel so young and happy. Sometimes, I cannot find words to describe my feelings. Above all, I appreciate Almighty God that I am alive to see this day". Tomori alone is the ONLY Living One Health Nigeria Legend/Pioneer and is probably best qualified to link up from the past to the present in One Health.

This article is dedicated to Veterinarian/Virologist Professor Oyewale Tomori at seventy-seven on February 3, 2023.

Keywords: Celebrating; Oyewale Tomori; One Health; Living Legend; Nigeria

Abbreviations

AFENET: African Field Epidemiology Network; AHIP: Animal: Human Interface Project, Nigeria; CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; CDC Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at Atlanta; DVM: Doctor of Veterinary Medicine; DVPHPM: Department of Veterinary Public Health and Preventive Medicine; FAS: Fellow, Academic Science; FCVSN: Nigeria College of Veterinary Surgeons; FRCPath (UK): Fellow of the Royal College

of Pathologists (UK); FETP: CDC Field Education Training Program; MPH: Master of Public Health; MPVM: Master of Veterinary Preventive Medicine; NAS: Nigeria Academy of Science; NFEITP: Nigeria Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists (UK); NCVSN: Nigeria College of Veterinary Surgeons; NNOM: Nigeria National Order of Merit; NAM: US National Academy of Medicine; OHI: One Health Initiative; OHN: One Health Nigeria; OHO: One Health Office; PhD:

Doctor of Philosophy; UCH: University College Hospital; UI: University of Ibadan; US: United States; VMO: Veterinary Medical Officer; VPH: Veterinary Public Health; VPHD: Veterinary Public Health Division at CDC; WHO: World Health Organisation

Introduction

Oyewale Tomori, DVM, PhD, FAS, FCVSN, FRCPath (UK) NNOM, FASTMH, NAM, a past President, of the Nigerian Academy of Science, was the pioneer Vice-Chancellor (2004-2011), at the Redeemer's University, Nigeria. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists (UK), Nigeria Academy of Science, and Nigeria College of Veterinary Surgeons and a recipient of the Nigeria National Order of Merit (NNOM), Nigeria's highest award for academic, intellectual attainment, and national development. He is an international member of the US National Academy of Medicine.

Since graduation from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Veterinary College, Oyewale Tomori has combined his training as a veterinarian and a public health virologist to use science to benefit society, improve disease diagnosis, and prevent untold human suffering in many African countries.

Between 1994 and 2004, as the Regional Virologist at the WHO Africa Region, he set up the African Regional Polio Laboratory Network, comprising sixteen laboratories, providing diagnostic support for the confirmation of the absence of poliovirus infection, bringing closer, the attainment of the global polio eradication initiative.

His expertise was brought into play, using the polio laboratory network as a model and template for setting up other regional diagnostic laboratory networks for measles, yellow fever, and other viral hemorrhagic fevers.

He has served, since 1971, as a University teacher and researcher during which, among other achievements, he, elucidated the properties of a virus - Orungo virus-, which he registered with the International Committee of Virus Taxonomy. In addition, he led research efforts that investigated viral infections, including Lassa fever, Yellow Fever, Chikungunya, and other arbovirus infections in Nigeria. He was later to bring his expertise, as the Regional Virologist for Africa, serving at the forefront of investigating disease outbreaks in many African countries – polio yellow fever, Ebola, Marburg and other hemorrhagic fever infections in Liberia, DR Congo Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, iii) assisted in the training of more than thirty medical, veterinary and science graduates as virologists, and iv) developed, while working at the US CDC, Atlanta, a unique diagnostic virus neutralization test for the Lassa fever. He received US DHHS Public Health Service Certificate for this contribution to Lassa Fever Research.

Oyewale Tomori with his expertise in the laboratory and field aspects of disease surveillance, prevention and control, has served and currently serves several national and international advisory bodies: Nigeria National Task Force on Epidemic Diseases; Expert Working Group (EWG) for the Development of National Laboratory Services Policy; Nigeria Expert Review Committee (ERC) on Poliomyelitis Eradication and Routine Immunization and the Nigerian Laboratory Technical Working Group guiding the practice of laboratories in Nigeria.

At the international level, has served on the US-IOM Committee on Sustainable Global Surveillance of zoonotic diseases; US-IOM Committee on identifying and prioritizing new preventive vaccines for development; WHO Africa Regional Certification Committee (ARCC) for Poliomyelitis Eradication; WHO Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research; WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE); Co-Chairman, African Science Academies' Study Team on Country Ownership of Africa's Development – Post 2015 plan on MDGs. He is one of the 15 Commissioners and Vice Chairman of the Commission on Creating a Global Health Risk Framework for the Future recently appointed by the World Bank, Rockefeller Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the US National Academy of Medicine. The Commission's Report recommended an effective global architecture for recognizing and mitigating the threat of epidemic infectious diseases. He is a member of the World Bank IWG on Financing Preparedness and Response.

He was a Senior Editor of African Journal of Laboratory Medicine (AJLM), and currently serves on the ASLM Board. On COVID19, he served as the Laboratory Planning and Quality Monitoring Adviser to the WHO -AFRO Regional Director and is the Chairman, Ministerial Expert Advisory Committee on Covid19 Health Sector Response. He is a member of the Global Virome Project Leadership Board, Senior Fellow, Scowcroft Institute at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University. He currently serves as Chair, Board of Biovaccines Nigeria Ltd, Chairman, Ministerial Expert Advisory Committee of the Health Sector COVID-19 Response (MEACoC), Member WHO Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Vaccine Composition (TAG-CO-VAC) and Member, GAVI Independent Review Committee (IRC).

Dr. Tomori has been Guest Speaker at numerous national and international conferences and has authored/co-authored more than 160 publications in peer-reviewed journals, 5857 citations and h-index: 36. He is a prolific commentator on public issues, especially on education, science, and good governance.

He passionately believes in the ability of Africa to solve her problems with domestic resources and good governance [1,2].

Materials and Methods

Since 2011, data collection include

- One Health Interview post 2011- 2012 Sabbatical Leave as a Veterinary Academic Consultant under the Africa Field Epidemiology Network/Center for the Control and Prevention of Diseases (CDC) Animal: Human Interface (AHI) Project, Nigeria [3,4].
- [Other](#) interviews to date,
- E-mail interactions
- Literature review of available related publications
- Online Publication [2]

Results and Discussion

Professor Oyewale Tomori a veterinary doctor, a virologist who was working among the physicians, and one of the pioneer heads of the Virology Department at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan. Professor Tomori is a Nigerian One health model. Professor Tomori received his DVM from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and his PhD in Virology from the University of Ibadan. Former President of the Nigeria Academy of Science, he was recently international member of the US National Academy of Medicine in 2016. Earlier, he was the Vice-Chancellor of Redeemers' University, Nigeria.

Stated Professor Tomori, during the post sabbatical Leave interview [5]

Then we had (older) people like Professor Gabriel Esuruoso who was the pioneer Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Professor Montefiore, a bacteriologist, (described by James Steele as "the Englishman... one that was so enthused about fusing veterinary and human medicine"⁶ Professor Montefiore was actually a bacteriologist, but he was a person who appreciated people's talents; it did not matter to him whether you were a technologist, virologist, or whatever. Once he needed a solution, he made use of everyone. That was the beauty of his nature that brought us together. In fact, among the people in the teaching hospital, he was the closest I worked with because he understood perfectly what the essence of the whole thing was.

Professor Oyewale Tomori, who worked with the late Professor Montefiore as a young Veterinarian and later became the first WHO Regional Virologist for the African Region, co-authored a textbook, - Tropical Microbiology - with Professors Alausa and Montefiore⁷ described Professor Montefiore with this deserving Epithet: "... He was a person who appreciated talents; it didn't matter to him whether you were a technologist, virologist or a cleaner. Once he considered you a part of the solution, he called on you to use your talent. That was the beauty of his nature that brought us together. In fact, among the people in the teaching hospital, he was the closest I worked with because he understood perfectly what One Health was all about, long before people became aware".

When the spirit of One Health was reinvigorated in the eighties, the One Health Initiative (still is) promoting it worldwide, Professor Oyewale Tomori was the first Nigerian (the author was the second) to sign up as a supporter and promoter of One Health Initiative in 2008 [8-10].

The author was more closely connected with Tomori after his 2011-2012 sabbatical leave at the Nigeria Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program NFEELTP Veterinary Medical Officer and the for the above and had a One Health/One Health Curriculum interview on May 1st, 2012 [11]. Prior and since then he continues to be still actively involved in One Health promotion activities in Nigeria. One of his most passionate was his August 25, 2008 declaration: Polio Eradication-A Battle I fought with undiluted passion, says Professor Oyewale Tomori, a major player who made this feat possible; and ending the article with the declaration: "Truly, the joy of seeing Africa Polio-free has drastically reduced my age and I feel so young and happy. Sometimes, I cannot find words to describe my feelings. Above all, I appreciate Almighty God that I am alive to see this day" [11,12].

In 2021 was the famous headline in Nigeria media "Prof. Tomori Breaks down in Tears, Blames FG for Canada, UK COVID-19 Sanctions" [13]. In May 2022, Tomori, spoke at the fourth hybrid 'International Conference of the Centre for Control of Prevention of Zoonoses (CCPZ) on Emerging Disease Threats and Mitigation Strategies: Holistic and Global Perspective', May 2022. He says Nigeria needs the one-health approach because animals and humans live and share the same ecosystems and are infected by many of the same microbes [14].

[Recently](#) published in the Daily Post newspaper on September 18, 2022, the infectious disease expert also urged African countries to speed up actions on containing the spread of the monkey pox disease and not wait on international organizations for succor. "... Our focus should be awareness, identify the disease as quickly as we can, isolate the cases, ensure infection prevention and control" [15].

In probably his latest public opinion, he advocates that "Nigeria needs to take science more seriously - an agenda for the new president" [16].

Between 2013 and 2014, the One Health World witnessed the demise of three pioneers of One Health in Nigeria- Prof Gabriel Oluwole Esuruoso, the Father of Veterinary Public Health in Nigeria, who died on 26th January 2013 aged 80; Prof James Steele, often referred to as the "father of veterinary public health", died Nov. 10 2013, aged 100 years old; and Prof David Goldsmith Montefiore, passed away on June 10 2014, aged 85 [17-19].

Tomori alone is the ONLY Living One Health Nigeria Legend/ Pioneer. He personifies what One Health perceptions and practices are! He is therefore, like a link between the old and the present and probably best qualified to link up from the past to the present in One Health (in Nigeria).

Conclusion

Oyewale Tomori, DVM, PhD, FAS, FCVSN, FRCPath (UK) NNOM, FASTMH, NAM, a past President, of the Nigerian Academy of Science, was the pioneer Vice-Chancellor (2004-2011), at the Redeemer's University, Nigeria. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists (UK), Nigeria Academy of Science, and Nigeria College of Veterinary Surgeons and a recipient of the Nigeria National Order of Merit (NNOM), Nigeria's highest award for academic, intellectual attainment, and national development. He is an international member of the US National Academy of Medicine.

He is a prolific commentator on public issues, especially on education, science, and good governance. He combined his training as a veterinarian and a public health virologist to use science to benefit society, improve disease diagnosis, and prevent untold human suffering in many African countries.

This article is dedicated to Nigeria's One Health living legend Professor Oyewale Tomori, (DVM, PhD, FAS, FCVSN, FRCPath (UK) NNOM, FASTMH, NAM).

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This study was self-funded.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethics Statement

My 2011- 2012 Sabbatical Leave Principal, Dr Lora Davis, the Nigeria Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program NFEELTP Veterinary Medical Officer, and the for the above and also to have a One Health/One Health Curriculum interview with Professor James Steele.

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- Dr Patrick Ngugi of the Nigeria Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program FELTP
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- Professor Oyewale Tomori – a third 2012 interactive post sabbatical leave quadrangle interviewee [5].
- The University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria - my workplace from where I got approval for the 2011-2012 Sabbatical Leave.

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