

Success Amidst Conflict: GLLP's Impact and Future Prospects in Ukraine

To systematically assess the Global Laboratory Leadership Programme's (GLLP) impact in Ukraine, the APHL Monitoring and Evaluation team conducted structured interviews with one member from the GLLP Steering Committee, one member from the Technical Working Group, two Programme mentors and two participants. Additionally, we reviewed the work plan, annual progress documents and workshop evaluations as part of the efforts.



GLLP Ukraine participants, mentors, instructors, and APHL staff. June 2023 Krakow, Poland.

Introduction

In 2021, APHL embarked on a journey to support implementing the GLLP in Ukraine. Despite the outbreak of war in early 2022, the Ukrainian partners exhibited resilience, flexibility and commitment, leading to momentous success. This success was evident in developing and customizing the curriculum, crafting criteria and recruitment for the first cohort, and engaging the first GLLP in the four components of the program: didactic workshops, mentorship, project-based learning and the development of a community of practice.

Engagement with Partners: Building Blocks for a Sustainable Program

One of the key and early steps was the approval by the Ukrainian Ministry of Health to establish a GLLP Steering Committee (SC) and a Technical Working Group (TWG), laying the foundation for strategic collaboration and program sustainability. Participant and mentor recruitment for the new program was initially scheduled to begin in March 2022. However, the outbreak of war in late February 2022 rendered conducting the GLLP as planned impossible. Taras Ostapchuk, a TWG member and the former acting Head of the Work Management Department of the Ukrainian Public Health Center, emphasized the SC's role in addressing the challenges faced in implementing the program: "The Steering Committee decided to conduct the training outside of Ukraine and limited the first cohort to female participants, as men are not allowed to cross the border."

The TWG played an equally pivotal role in implementing the GLLP. Comprising a diverse array of members from various backgrounds and including representatives of the animal, environmental and human health sectors, the TWG defined criteria for participants and mentors, developed an implementation plan and established Programme timelines. With five members contributing to the applicant review process, the TWG received applications and recruited 12 participants and seven mentors for the first cohort. Mariana Azarskova, an SC member and laboratory advisor at Ukraine CDC, highlighted the inclusive One Health approach: "One of our greatest successes was ensuring representation from various sectors." This approach facilitated transparency and resulted in a diverse cohort, fostering rich collaboration.

Testimonials: Mentors and Participants Speak

As of March 2024, four of the five planned workshops for the first cohort have been completed, led by a team of international experts. National mentors attended all program sessions, allowing Ukraine to build a cadre of instructors to facilitate subsequent GLLP offerings. Each participant was assigned a mentor, and with their mentor's guidance, the participants worked to identify and complete projects based on the workshop session topics. Ihor Dvylyuk, a GLLP mentor and vice president at the National University of Veterinary Medicine and Biotechnologies of Lviv, reflected on his interaction with the participants and acknowledged their visible skill development: **"Their communication skills, their confidence to hold their ground, their presentation skills have been improved significantly."**

The program's impact extended beyond the training room as participants completed projects addressing critical issues in their respective laboratories. Mariana Azarskova, the SC member, referred to a project on finding a gap in ISO standards: **"It can be replicated at the country level and beyond."** Ihor Dvylyuk iterated his interest in continuing his role as a mentor: **"I see the impact of the program in myself and the participants. It is yet to conclude whether mentors benefited more or the participants."**

Participants in the program have completed initial projects and are now developing capstone projects. These projects, which concentrate on areas such as biosafety system implementation, risk assessment and staff training, showcase the depth and breadth of leadership skills nurtured in the program and emphasize laboratory systems development. Participants emphasized soft skills, such as communication, public speaking, networking and teamwork, which, while not explicitly taught, were crucial to their success. Oleksandra Sheiko, an immunologist, noted her **increased confidence and influence on colleagues**, while Nataliia Nenysh, head of the Virology Department, highlighted **the impact of communication skills on staff motivation, emphasizing effective leadership beyond financial incentives.**

Participants recognized how the program enhanced their technical skills and significantly improved their soft skills, which played a crucial role in their work's quality. This included the development of effective networking abilities. Nataliia Babii from the Ukraine Public Health Center emphasized **the value of networking, highlighting the creation of an inter-sectoral network to address laboratory system challenges from a One Health perspective.** This sentiment is echoed by Svetlana Shuliak, head of the Chemical and Toxicological Research Department at the State Research Institute for Laboratory Diagnostics and Veterinary and Sanitary Expertise. Shuliak noted that her **participation in the GLLP program provided her with a broader understanding of laboratory operations and underscored the critical importance of soft skills, such as leadership, communication and advocacy in improving cooperation and the quality of laboratory processes.** Their experiences exemplify the multifaceted benefits of participating in professional development initiatives like the GLLP.

Future Direction

Participants, mentors and government authorities unanimously testified to the quality and impact of the GLLP program on the public health system in Ukraine. They requested APHL continue its role in bringing in expertise and creating a platform so they can share their successes and challenges with other countries implementing GLLP. APHL will continue to work with the Ukraine Public Health Center and CDC Ukraine to support the first GLLP cohort as they finalize their capstone projects and complete the Programme. APHL also continues to strategize with partners for the institutionalization of GLLP for long-term planning and Programme sustainability.



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