

Editorial to the HELINA 2017 proceedings

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The HELINA 2017 Conference

The 10th HELINA (HEaLth INformatics in Africa) conference was organized from 23 to 26 April 2017 in Bujumbura, Burundi. The event was hosted and organized by the Burundi Health Informatics Association (BHIA) which is an independent organisation created to promote the application of Health Informatics in Burundi. BHIA and is a registered member of the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) and HELINA.

HELINA is the pan-African health informatics organization which has a tradition of organizing this event that goes back to 1993. Previous HELINA conferences were hosted in Ghana (2015), Nigeria (1993), South Africa (1996 & 2003), Zimbabwe (1999), Mali (2007), Ivory Coast (2009), Cameroon (2011) and Kenya (2013).

HELINA 2017 aimed to focus on the development and implementation of integrated e-Health plans and policies that builds bridges between existing information management silos and propose pathways to close the gaps in African e-Health developments related to infrastructure, e-health enabled human resources, international standards application, legal and ethical frameworks, sustainable funding mechanisms and the use of robust and down-to-earth ICT solutions. Special attention was paid to the role of e-Health in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) voted by the UN in September 2015 and more specifically to goal 9, target 9c which aims to “*Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries by 2020*”.

Conference Themes

The call for submissions for HELINA 2017 covered a broad range of health informatics topics with relevance for Africa under the title “Integrated Health Information Management Resources for Global HealthCare Strategies”. Academic research papers and case study/experience papers were solicited within the following themes:

- National and Regional e-Health Strategies and Policies
- Health Information Systems Interoperability
- Human capacity building for e-Health
- Sustainable systems implementations
- ICT-solutions for Universal Health Coverage

Submissions of papers that fell outside any of these themes were also acceptable as long as they demonstrated any relevance for the health informatics domain in Africa.

Review process

A first call for papers was published in English and in French and sent out in October 2016 with a deadline for submissions on 15 January 2017. A total of 37 submissions were received in due time for the HELINA 2017 conference. A double blind peer review process was used for evaluating each paper in a first round. All received submissions were anonymized before being submitted to at least 2 reviewers according to their expertise. The reviewers had the option to accept submissions either as full research papers or case study/experience papers. The SPC chairs based their final decision on the acceptance of each submission on the recommendations and comments from reviewers. Accepted submissions were then sent back to the authors for revision according to the reviewers’ comments. The final reviewed paper

versions submitted by the authors were checked by the SPC chairs on technical criteria. This review process resulted in the following acceptance rates:

- Full research papers: 38% (n=14)
- Case studies and experience papers: 49% (n=18)
- Rejected or retracted papers: 13% (n=5)

In order to be included in the conference proceedings, an accepted paper had to be presented at the conference.

HELINA 2017 conference content

Conference papers were organized in a number of thematic tracks:

- National and regional e-health strategies and policies (5 papers)
- Data mining and big data analytics (8 papers)
- Capacity building and health informatics education (3 papers)
- Systems interoperability (4 papers)
- Medical devices and telemedicine (3 papers)
- Sustainable health information systems for Africa (6 papers)
- Universal health coverage (3 papers)

The most popular topics were *Data mining and big data analytics*, as well as *Sustainable health information systems for Africa*. Various workshops and panel discussions were also included in the programme. The papers presented at the conference indicated that a lot of good work is being done across Africa in terms of working towards universal health coverage supported by e-health interventions.

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