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AUB Global Health Institute Hosts Convening in Jordan to Advance Responsible AI for Global Health in the MENA Region

The Global Health Institute (GHI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) hosted the Advancing Responsible AI for Global Health in the MENA Region convening in Jordan, in collaboration with The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) and with support from the International Development Research Centre and the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office. The two-day event brought together regional experts and international partners to strategically address the responsible adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for global health in low-resource settings, emphasizing Global South leadership to bridge the widening AI gap.

Day one of the convening featured two expert-led panel discussions bringing together leading voices from research, policy, and practice to explore ethical, technical, and governance frameworks for AI in global health, highlighting regional experiences and pathways for responsible innovation.

In her keynote, Dr. Wessam El Beih, MENA regional director for the International Development Research Centre, stressed the necessity of moving AI leadership to the Global South to "decolonize health" and reflect local realities. Dr. Shadi Saleh, founding director of AUB GHI, highlighted the urgent need for action, noting that without immediate intervention, low- and middle-income countries risk being "half a century behind" in leveraging health AI. He affirmed that GHI is actively working to bridge this gap by leading the co-development of a competency-based governance curriculum. Dr. Mohannad Nsour, executive director of EMPHNET, reinforced the importance of regional participation in this new era of technology.

Presentations showcased GHI's existing work in the field. Dr. Nadine Sabra, manager of AUB GHI's E-Sahha Digital Health Program, detailed how the program is fostering low-cost AI innovations and strengthening governance through a dedicated curriculum and certification. Dr. Ramzi Halabi, chief technology officer and biomedical engineering lead at b.r.a.i.n, scientist and consultant at the University of Toronto, and AI senior fellow at AUB GHI, outlined the fundamental requirements for effective AI in low-resource settings, emphasizing local data validation and ethical governance as critical components for relevant and fair solutions.

Two core panels brought together diverse perspectives on implementation. The first panel, Bridging Research and Practice: Perspectives on Responsible AI in Global Health, moderated by Dr. Mehdi Snene, senior advisor to the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Digital and Emerging Technologies, addressed implementation challenges and opportunities,

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stressing the importance of aligning strategies with national priorities and building solutions on strong, locally relevant data. Dr. Osama El Hassan, chairman of ZIMAM, UAE, emphasized aligning AI strategies with national priorities and embedding AI within the national agenda. Dr. Rose Nzyoka, co-chair at Global Digital Health Network, Kenya, highlighted the critical need for building AI solutions on strong foundational data and engaging end-users from the outset. Dr. Iftikhar Ahmed, AI/ML Specialist at PHC Global, Pakistan, focused on balancing transparency and accuracy, stressing process transparency in data sourcing and cleaning. Anneka Wickramanayake, director of research design and evaluation at Jacaranda Health, Kenya, advocated for moving from flashy concepts to functional, scalable solutions integrated into existing health systems.

The second panel, From Concept to Impact: Advancing Health Outcomes Through Responsible AI in Low-Resource Settings, moderated by Emily Nicholson, digital transformation consultant at UNICEF, focused on translating AI concepts into real-world impact. Jhon Magkilat, knowledge and training advisor for health AI at The Global Agency for Responsible AI in Health, Switzerland, emphasized that regulation must be robust yet flexible to keep pace with innovation. Dr. Aral Sürmeli, founder and CEO, HERA Digital Health, highlighted the need to design tools for real-world constraints, noting most algorithms are trained on Global North data. Dr. Zakaria Belrhiti, assistant professor at University Mohammed VI Polytechnic, Morocco, emphasized involving multiple stakeholders throughout development and deployment, guided by the "5 C's" for responsible AI: confidence, context, co-design, collaboration, and capacity-building. Dr. Martin Saban, researcher from Argentina, stressed that AI should enhance healthcare delivery rather than replace human professionals, focusing on human-centered care.

Day two saw subject-matter experts, researchers, and policymakers engage in six interactive sessions focused on the co-design and co-creation of a capacity-building offering in the field of responsible AI, tailored to the needs and realities of low-resource settings. This workshop reinforced the vital role of regional partnerships, shared expertise, and collective action in advancing responsible and context-appropriate AI for global health.

A short recap video highlighting key moments from the convening is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnGhd19hVIs>

More information on the E-Sahha Digital Health Program at GHI is available at: <https://ghi.aub.edu.lb/esp/>

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Note to Editors

About AUB

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Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 790 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 9000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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About GHI

The Global Health Institute (GHI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) addresses global health challenges with a focus on context and sustainable impact by employing an interdisciplinary approach. GHI is structured into three divisions: The Programs Division, which leads research, policy, and advocacy efforts; the Academy Division, which provides capacity-building initiatives for diverse populations; and the ASSIST Division, which supports community-level actors, particularly non-governmental organizations, with a range of services and resources.

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