

Strengthening Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response System in two border Districts - Kambia and Kailahun

Health Systems Strengthening and Epidemic Prevention in Sierra Leone

Background

Population movements across national borders have been identified as the key factor contributing to the exacerbation of cross-border transmission of communicable diseases. The spread of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) between 2014 and 2016 in West Africa was believed to be largely aggravated by the high degree of mobility, including free movement of people across borders in the region.

The devastating outbreak which started in Guinea spread rapidly through the tri-border countries (Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia). In Sierra Leone it was leading to the near collapse of the already fragile health system and the loss of lives, including many health practitioners. In Sierra Leone alone, a total of more than 14,000 cases and in overall more than 3900 deaths.

There are significant challenges in Sierra Leone's Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) system to early detect report and control communicable and epidemic prone diseases and events. This is as a result of critical shortages in human resources for effective and efficient collection, collation, processing and analysing of health-related data to inform timely decision-making. Consequently, strengthening the surveillance and response system will mitigate serious impact of any future or potential epidemic outbreak.

An effective and efficient surveillance and reporting system at Peripheral Health Units (PHUs) in border districts is crucial for the early detection, prevention and reporting of epidemic prone diseases as they are often the first points of contact for sick travelers.

Approach

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) supports the Sierra Leonean Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) in building up a resilient health care system.

As one of its priority fields, the GIZ Health Systems Strengthening and Epidemic Prevention Project seeks to strengthen the efficiency of the surveillance system for reportable diseases and events in communities and districts in order to prevent, respond and control future outbreaks.

The improved surveillance system will be implemented as a pilot scheme in **two border districts Kailahun and Kambia** which were hotspots during the recent EVD outbreak.



Left: District Medical Officer of the MoHS Kailahun discusses cross-border measures at the MoHS-GIZ strategy and operational planning workshop in Freetown, October 2017

Right: Key representatives from the districts and GIZ technical staff develop a common roadmap at the MoHS-GIZ strategy and operational planning workshop



Left: Community engagement is vital to control the spread of epidemics and diseases. GIZ Health Advisor trains Community Health Workers to sensitize the affected communities on cholera prevention after the mudslide in Regent, Freetown, in August 2017

Right: Key stakeholders at a cross-border meeting organized by the GIZ Project in Kailahun, December 2017

October 2017, the MoHS-GIZ strategy and operational planning workshop was held in the capital Freetown. A joint assessment of the two border districts' level of epidemic preparedness was conducted in July 2017 to inform the project's roadmap. At the MoHS-GIZ Strategic and Implementation workshop in October 2018, together with key partners and representatives from the districts, it was agreed to implement the following activities in Kambia and Kailahun Districts for this field of priority:

1) Strengthen IDSR System

- Capacity building - training of District Health Management Teams and health workers from Peripheral Health Units on IDSR and data management for quality and timely reporting
- Strengthen community-based surveillance in the two pilot districts through periodic refresher training for Community Health Workers.
- Strengthen Peripheral Health Units, Port Health and hospital (IDSR) data management.
- Strengthen knowledge of traditional healers and community structures on early case detection and reporting, through organized training and community meetings.
- Develop and introduce a digitalized IDSR data system at border Peripheral Health Units to improve the data collection and transfer quality in the Health Management Information System. The project will train the personnel of relevant actors on its practical applications.

2) Enhance Community Confidence

- Moderate confidence building activities to increase the utilisation of health care services since the Ebola epidemic considerably reduced the population's confidence in the health care system.

3) Introduce regular Cross Border Meetings

- Provide technical support for monthly cross-border meetings in Kambia and Kailahun for increased coordination and information sharing with Guinean and Liberian counterparts.

Cholera Prevention in Freetown

On the 14th August 2017, mudslides and severe flash floods devastated communities in Regent and other parts of Freetown, causing hundreds of deaths and large-scale displacement.

The GIZ Project supported the MoHS Emergency Operational Center (EOC) and Health Education Department with essential healthcare services in order to prevent outbreak of diarrhea and cholera diseases in affected communities.

1. More than 400 Community Health Workers were trained in cholera risk communications in the affected communities, in order to use community platforms for collective and responsive decisions to improve hygiene and sanitation.

2. EOC communications pillar and Health Education Department (MoHS) were supported for media review and conducted press briefings TV, radio simulcast and discussions for a wide-reaching public awareness on cholera prevention and the uptake of first ever Oral Cholera Vaccine in the country.

The MoHS-GIZ mudslide and flood intervention successfully contributed to the prevention of cholera outbreak amongst affected populations and with no case of cholera confirmed in the affected communities and the country at large.

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