

Advancing Community Leadership in the Fight Against COVID-19

Breakthrough ACTION's outreach campaign helped communities face their fears head-on



The fight to curb the spread of COVID-19 is a formidable challenge to countries around the world, and Africa, in particular, faces augmented challenges in addressing the global outbreak due to the density of its population, limited access to quality health care services, and lack of existing medical infrastructure and adequate equipment to manage the rapidly-rising

need for testing and treatment. Given this reality, major global partners in the COVID-19 response must work in tandem with governments to focus their efforts on prevention of the disease and on the promotion of actions that will stop its spread in communities. The West African nation of Guinea is no exception in this situation; as of July 23, 2020, the pandemic had affected nearly 7,000 Guineans.

The Breakthrough ACTION Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) program, which has been active in Guinea since 2019, began its efforts well prior to the official announcement of the first case of COVID-19 in the country, providing support to the Government of Guinean to promote adoption of positive health behaviors to better prevent and manage public health emergencies. To fulfill these goals, Breakthrough ACTION actively supports the Ministry of Health in their response to endemic and emerging threats and was most recently called upon as the MOH's core technical partner for social and behavior change (SBC) around COVID-19.

Breakthrough ACTION built upon its previous work supporting the National Health Security Agency (ANSS) and expanded it to meet the emerging challenges posed by the COVID-19 response. The project started providing technical support for Covid-19 in February 2020, well before the first cases were

declared in the country; these early communication efforts aimed to improve general awareness and promote the behaviors already known to be most protective against COVID-19.

As the Government's principal risk communication partner, the USAID-funded Breakthrough ACTION project has provided specialized expertise to the MOH and partners throughout the COVID-19 outbreak to design and deploy strategies for SBC that meet the needs of the population in an ever-evolving situation of risk and uncertainty. The project developed the first communication materials for the general public, ranging from posters available in all strategic locations in the



country to audio-visual materials widely distributed via privately-owned and community media. The COVID-19 posters are still hanging in various high-visibility locations in the capital city. Additionally, the project led 20 interactive COVID-19 related radio programs organized through 15 community radio stations and five private national radio stations. Audio materials reached the population through mobile technology; over 26,000 people were reached by IVR messaging. Both audio and video materials were also disseminated through social media; over 13,000 people were reached through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter. Collectively, Breakthrough ACTION's print and audiovisual products have reached thousands of people, and improved knowledge on COVID-19. Above all, they catalyzed community dialogue regarding people's concerns, fears, and behavior change related to the outbreak.

Community outreach was an important component of Breakthrough ACTION's multi-channel response. To this end, the project collaborated with *Corona N'Tondi* (translation: "Corona, I Refuse" in the Soussou language), a citizen-driven campaign to disseminate messages on COVID-19 transmission, treatment, and prevention methods in the prefectures of Faranah, Coyah, Dubréka, and Conakry. *Corona N'Tondi* activities leveraged the wide reach of local media, such as radio, to disseminate key messages, but also took a proactive boots-on-the-ground, direct-outreach strategy to reach communities most vulnerable to the virus. The objective of taking the direct outreach approach was to directly gather the specific concerns, beliefs and fears of affected communities around the evolving outbreak, in order to develop more tailored, appropriate and context-specific messages that address actual concerns of the community and rumors circulating in the area.


Both Coyah and Dubréka are sites where social tension and reticence to adopt prevention measures has been high; the population rejected certain health measures such as mask requirements and the closure of mosques. Breakthrough ACTION and partners met with the authorities and opinion leaders in these zones to discuss attitudes openly and determine the best strategies to combat this reticence. With close involvement of leaders and NGOs in the targeted areas, the project and the MOH adapted messages which addressed public resistance to the public health recommendations and lingering mistrust from the Ebola epidemic. Breakthrough ACTION, within the COVID-19 community engagement campaign, supported teams of local authorities and youth NGO volunteers to target households for awareness raising sessions and distribution of handwashing kits. In total, 800 handwashing kits (consisting of a 70-litre skip, a 30-litre catch bucket, a stool and 24 pieces of soap) were distributed to 1,254 households. Through this awareness raising activity, Breakthrough ACTION was able to reach more than 9,000 Guinean citizens with essential information about the prevention and spread of COVID-19. Complementary strategies helped achieve this impact, including door-to-door outreach and the use of a mobile sound system that played awareness messages throughout neighborhoods. The campaign team made a stop in the markets, offering marketgoers information to reduce the risk of infection in their day-to-day lives.



Breakthrough ACTION's efforts in conjunction with the Government and civil society demonstrate the critical place of well-designed risk communication and community engagement strategies in outbreak response. Where trust is low, strong rapport with local leaders and a focused effort to hear from and respond to the community's voiced concerns pays dividends in bringing communities to embrace prevention.

"Thanks to your visit this morning, I've come to understand that Covid-19 is a reality. It is true that we were reticent because in this country everything is political. But I promise to bring my family and my neighbors back to their senses for the respect of the wearing of masks and the washing of hands especially" - Head of Household in Coyah

"We have received several missions here for distribution, but this is the first organization that not only brings quality kits but also takes the trouble to exchange with the communities, understand their concerns and answer their questions. We



salute your support and promise to take care of them but also to convey these messages in other neighborhoods” - Chief of Bonfi Neighborhood

This success story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Breakthrough ACTION and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.