

Sharing Knowledge in the Midst of a Pandemic: Breakthrough ACTION Guinea Takes One Health Platforms Virtual

Context

From the GHSA work that all countries have undertaken over the past several years—especially in the context of both the Ebola outbreaks and the COVID-19 pandemic—it is clear that diseases do not respect borders. Preventing and containing outbreaks therefore often require countries to work closely together. In addition, the nature of outbreaks is such that countries must also be able to respond swiftly using systems in place when crises strike. And as we have seen with recent outbreaks, especially those along the One Health continuum, outbreaks are not only health problems. Indeed, outbreaks are often connected to agricultural practices and the environment. The importance of coordinating the work of different ministries agencies to ensure a successful response could not be overstated.

As such, Breakthrough ACTION supports Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Environment, Forestry, and more, along with civil society and the general population to promote risk communication and behavior change strategies to better understand the role that each group must play to avoid or limit future outbreaks.

Challenge:

Countries have much to learn from one another and can leverage successes to combat their own outbreaks. Though most countries understand the benefit of a south-to-south collaboration to gather best practices and lessons learned, many countries operate in silos. In addition, most ministries lack the resources to send officials on these missions.

In 2020, several Breakthrough ACTION countries planned in-person exchanges with their supported ministries with the goal of breaking down the silos countries have been operating in. Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions with COVID-19, these in-person visits were canceled.

Actions Taken:

To ensure effective exchange and collaboration in the midst of a pandemic, Breakthrough ACTION Guinea drew on its experience with the One Health Platforms and organized three Francophone One Health Platform virtual knowledge exchanges with Côte d'Ivoire, the

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, and Senegal. Led by Breakthrough ACTION Guinea, relevant Breakthrough ACTION teams sought targeted exchanges to address actual needs, surveying country stakeholders to determine topics of interest. Two knowledge exchange sessions were facilitated by One Health leaders from Guinea. The first focused on the development of a systematic information exchange mechanism between the different emergency response actors, and the second focused on the development of information management mechanisms to share with other sectors, including the media, civil society, and the private sector. The third session, which was facilitated by the Breakthrough ACTION Senegal and Mali's Monitoring and Evaluation teams, was dedicated to finding ways to better understand the levels of knowledge on the risks of exposure of community members to public health threats to adapt messages and interventions accordingly. Additionally, Breakthrough ACTION structured discussion sessions at the end of these exchanges and encouraged all participants to think about proposed solutions and how to continue conversations with country counterparts to share implemented successes. All questions and proposed solutions were captured and shared in the final reports.

Impact

Each two-and-a-half-hour exchange consisted of a presentation by an individual country with relevant experience and a lively, productive discussion addressing the questions, problems, and experiences that participants raised. These sessions were attended by 75 people working within the framework of the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) in five countries (Guinea, Mali, DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal). Depending on the country and the configuration of One Health, these frameworks report to either the Ministry of Livestock, the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Environment.

Session participants greatly appreciated the quality of the exchanges and the rich experiences shared. They were very interested in these exchanges and even asked for their perpetuation in time. Additionally, Breakthrough ACTION Guinea created a "Communities of Practice" for the Francophone One Health Platforms where further experiences, tools, and resources can be shared.

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