

Hidden Gems: How Outcome Harvesting Revealed Breakthrough ACTION's Impact in Guinea

Breakthrough ACTION in Guinea

Since 2019, the project has built social and behavioral change (SBC) capacity among risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) actors in Guinea and contributed to the development of national-level strategies, plans, and message guides to help unify priority zoonotic disease (PZD) prevention and response throughout the country. Project staff work in close collaboration with the Government of Guinea, the Ministry of Health (MOH), Department of Health Promotion (Service National de Promotion de la Santé; SNPS), the National Health Security Agency (Agence Nationale de Sécurité Sanitaire; ANSS), and the One Health platform. Breakthrough ACTION employs SBC approaches such as mass media campaigns and community engagement and has established partnerships with nongovernmental organizations at the community level and RCCE actors at the national and regional levels. Through One Health communication and promotion focal points, Breakthrough ACTION organizes and facilitates community dialogues in targeted reticent communities, encouraging open discussions and dismantling rumors.

The Challenge

Measuring the impact of Breakthrough ACTION in Guinea poses a unique challenge due to the multifaceted nature of the project's initiatives. For example, adopting priority health behaviors, improving, or changing outcomes at the organizational or structural levels, and determining the effectiveness of zoonotic disease prevention efforts all add layers of intricacy to achieving the project's desired outcomes. Breakthrough ACTION's PZD work encompasses a wide range of activities, from health behavior promotion to zoonotic disease prevention to health services uptake, so precisely defining and predicting all possible outcomes in advance is difficult. Moreover, the outcomes may evolve over time and might not align with traditional quantitative indicators. Adding to all this, outcomes may be context-dependent and vary widely among different populations and regions within Guinea.

Breakthrough ACTION used a research method known as "outcome harvesting" to address these complex and dynamic contexts which offers a flexible and adaptive approach, allowing evaluators to capture and document outcomes as they naturally emerge from the project's diverse activities.

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Outcome Harvesting Process

Outcome harvesting is a monitoring and evaluation method used to identify, verify, and make sense of changes influenced by an intervention. Unlike assessing progress towards predetermined goals, outcome harvesting adopts a retrospective approach to identify both the intended and unintended changes that transpired, irrespective of their positive or negative nature (Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012). Functioning as a monitoring approach, outcome harvesting regularly assesses the changes (i.e., outcomes) that have taken place, creating a clearer picture of when and how an intervention contributed to improving the quality of life for the Guinean people. By emphasizing qualitative data collection and narrative-based evidence, this methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Breakthrough ACTION's efforts in Guinea.

The outcome harvesting process in Guinea began with discussions related to the scope of the evaluation and identification of project impact. Breakthrough ACTION zeroed in on three program areas: (1) PZDs, (2) COVID-19, and (3) Ebola virus. It also identified four programmatic activities to assess: (1) Coordination and risk communication systems, (2) public communication, (3) capacity strengthening, and (4) community engagement.

Breakthrough ACTION Guinea categorized activity outcomes as intended or unintended changes and established meaningful connections between these outcomes and the organization's work. They developed detailed descriptions of each outcome, potential related activities, and compiled relevant sources, including people or groups involved. When documents were unavailable for verification, the project conducted interviews with external experts who were knowledgeable about Breakthrough ACTION's work but not directly involved. In contrast to the typical outcome harvesting process that verifies only a small percentage of outcomes (e.g., 5%), the staff chose to verify each individual outcome.

After external verification, the project systematically analyzed outcomes, categorized according to programmatic activities, and assessed them based on their alignment with the [Social and Behavior Change Communication Capacity Ecosystem](#) levels (individual, organization, system). This enabled the team to discern patterns, gain insight into the distribution of results, and synthesize overarching themes from the outcomes—crystallizing where its work was most effective and well-received by the community.

The interview phase transcended the evaluation the outcome harvesting process facilitated. The interviews offered profound insights into the overall perception of Breakthrough ACTION among RCCE experts in Guinea. These discussions provided nuanced perspectives and fostered deeper connections within the public health community in Guinea.

Impact of Breakthrough ACTION's Work

All individuals interviewed during the outcome harvesting process expressed their appreciation and commended the project for its exceptional RCCE contributions. Following are illustrative interviews that provide snapshots of Breakthrough ACTION's work across Guinea.



Ali Badra, a Red Cross representative, highlighted the significant value he gained from utilizing Breakthrough ACTION's [Harmonized Message Guide on Priority Zoonotic Diseases](#). As part of his work with the Red Cross in the 38 prefectures of Guinea, Ali described a transformative shift in the Red Cross' community messaging approach. Previously, they disseminated uniform messages across Guinea without considering the diverse cultural and environmental contexts. Following a Breakthrough ACTION training workshop and receiving copies of the guide, the Red Cross adopted a more community-centric approach by engaging directly with community members and actively listening to their concerns, rumors, and hesitations. They then tailored their messaging, using the same language and terms employed by the community. Ali's work often took him to various regions, including 376 subprefectures and 33 prefectures, covering five communes. He frequently referred to the guide to align partner approaches in the field.

In one case, during the Ebola outbreak in Nzérékoré, Ali faced challenges in areas where humanitarian workers were initially unwelcome. By using the guide and Breakthrough ACTION's radio spots to connect with the local population, the Red Cross gradually won community trust and acceptance. Their involvement with the community allowed them to understand the underlying reasons for initial apprehension toward humanitarian workers. Ali shared these insights with Breakthrough ACTION, which promptly produced spots to diffuse tensions. Ultimately, Breakthrough ACTION's messages helped bridge the gap between the Red Cross and the community, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration during the challenging time of the Ebola crisis.

Another interviewee, the RCCE communication focal point at the ANSS, **Jean Traore**, emphasized the pivotal role Breakthrough ACTION played in journalist trainings and how these trainings impacted the work of his agency. According to Jean, Breakthrough ACTION expanded journalists' capability to report accurately on health crises. He stressed the ongoing need for journalist training due to the turnover of personnel and new individuals filling positions. He believes the training provided by Breakthrough ACTION served a dual purpose: it helped journalists understand their role in effective communication during disease outbreaks and equipped them to combat the spread of misinformation during health crises.



Jean said if Breakthrough ACTION were to be removed from the equation, the communication efforts in Guinea would diminish significantly "to only 10%." Jean also mentioned they have adapted Breakthrough ACTION's work as a guiding framework for addressing other disease outbreaks, which highlights that while journalists like him perceive Breakthrough ACTION as indispensable, the project has equipped them for the future.



Idrissa Dieng, the chief of the vaccination team in Kissidougou, may not have been familiar with Breakthrough ACTION by name, but his enthusiasm was palpable when the interviewer mentioned the Breakthrough ACTION-led COVID-19 vaccination community dialogues conducted in in the Beindou sub-prefecture. He avidly shared his support for this type of community activity, emphasizing its invaluable role in facilitating his work. He noted that individuals tend to be more open and responsive when a team takes the initiative to introduce themselves and establish a connection, like Breakthrough ACTION did, laying the groundwork for subsequent

activities.

He vividly recalled an instance when he conducted a vaccination drive in Beindou that was a resounding success. According to Dieng, the Breakthrough ACTION-led dialogues that preceded the drive significantly eased the community’s hesitancy. Upon their arrival, the vaccination team was warmly welcomed by the community, and people were open to receiving the vaccine. He saw the difference between communities that had dialogues and those that did not. He emphasized that the project should continue their communication work as it had a positive impact on vaccination initiatives.

Kourouma Bakary, a One Health communication and promotion focal point in Kindia stated, “With my strongest conviction, and I say this at the highest volume, the dialogues were very helpful.” He found Breakthrough ACTION’s community dialogues to be particularly effective due to their participatory nature, enabling direct engagement to unearth the reasons behind vaccine hesitancy and dispel misconceptions. Driven by this engagement, vaccine coverage surged significantly, with current rates at around 72%, a phenomenal increase from 20% before the dialogues. According to Bakary, the work significantly enhanced trust and confidence between the community and health workers, as well as trust in vaccines. He shared instances where dialogues addressed concerns such as vaccine-induced sterility and unfounded beliefs about the intent of vaccines. These dialogues not only countered the rumors but also established a vital channel for community members to report their concerns. Prior to these efforts, there was no rapport between the community and health workers.



The acclaim for Breakthrough ACTION, echoed by all interviewees, serves as a powerful testament to the project’s profound impact within the realm of RCCE and Global Health Security programs. These commendations not only validate the project’s efficacy but also illuminate the enduring and positive imprint it has left on the communities it serves, as well as the health experts in Guinea. The widespread acknowledgment among experts significantly bolsters Breakthrough ACTION’s credibility and trustworthiness as a steadfast partner in social and behavior change initiatives. Furthermore, these affirmations stand as a resounding endorsement of Breakthrough ACTION’s mission, underscoring its indispensable contributions to the health and well-being of communities across Guinea.