

In Liberia, Collaborative Groups—and New Message Guide—Emerge from Training Sessions

Breakthrough ACTION, the flagship social and behavior change project funded by the United States Agency for International Development, supports the people of Liberia in a variety of technical areas. Breakthrough ACTION Liberia worked with the national One Health platform risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) Technical Working Groups (TWGs) to establish, at both national and subnational levels, a multi-sectoral approach to strengthening risk communication and community engagement.

One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and interdependent.

Background

Although implementers in Liberia initiated the One Health platform concept in 2017, it largely existed on paper, without an RCCE component. Local One Health partners had not established a TWG with the authority to communicate health risks. This created a lack of synergy and collaboration among partners, which led to confused messaging and an inadequate response to the public. Liberia needed a consolidated approach bringing together all partners to support various interventions directed through the One Health platform.

Between 2016 and 2019, Liberia conducted multiple reviews using the voluntary joint external evaluation to assess RCCE capacity across five key domains. These reviews revealed that resources and information in some domains decreased and identified key weaknesses to be strengthened, particularly risk communication systems.

The Approach

Based on these results, Breakthrough ACTION, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), designed a series of activities to strengthen RCCE systems in Liberia, beginning with the revision and finalization of the One Health governance manual (September 2021) following development of a National Action Plan for Health Security. The governance manual outlines the concepts, framework, and structural organization of the One Health platform in Liberia, including roles and responsibilities of key governmental units in managing public health emergencies. It also lays out



steps to facilitate understanding of key vectors for priority zoonotic diseases (PZDs) and strengthen capacities for preparedness, detection, and response to public health threats, in line with basic requirements of the 2005 International Health Regulations.

The RCCE TWG came into existence following the revisions of the governance manual. Its purpose is to strengthen and enhance public communication efforts before, during, and after public health emergencies.

After the revision of the One Health governance manual and inclusion of the RCCE TWG, Breakthrough ACTION and FAO, designed a training package that focused on building capacities for RCCE stakeholders at the national and subnational levels.

In December 2021, Breakthrough ACTION staff in Liberia identified and trained 74 One Health stakeholders in a Training of Trainers (ToT) that stressed RCCE facilitation techniques, including an overview of the Liberian One Health platform, and the One Health governance manual with plans to ensure that all 74 participants would cascade the training across all 15 counties.

Breakthrough ACTION Liberia staff, as of June 2022, supported the One Health national RCCE stepdown training in Monrovia and subnational trainings in all 12 project counties, excluding Sinoe, Gbapolu, and Rivercess. In total, the project trained 569 participants in RCCE, the One Health concept, social and behavior change (SBC), message development, and rumor management. At the national level, participants included One Health stakeholders from the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, National Public Health Institute of Liberia, Ministry of Commerce, Forestry Development Authority, Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Disaster Management Agency, and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

The national training included implementing partners representing the International Rescue Committee, Partners in Health, Italian Association Amicidi Raoul Follereau, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, and Africa One Health University Network Strategies To Prevent (Stop) Spillover project. Meanwhile, the subnational trainings included participants from all relevant local government stakeholders from county, district, community, and facility levels.



Representatives from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection Agency engage in group work during an RCCE training in December 2021. Credit: Breakthrough ACTION Liberia

Results

Following each subnational step-down training, each county-level RCCE chairperson and the national group established WhatsApp groups for their members. This led to coordination and information sharing among RCCE stakeholders and partners. The groups also serve as a space to apply learnings from the training related to multi-sectoral coordination, collaboration, and communication. The improved coordination among these government stakeholders and partners at both the national and subnational levels ensured that partners drafted and completed the national One Health message guide for PZDs for Liberia. This document, produced for the first time in Liberia, focused on 10 PZDs under surveillance.

“Since the ToT, we have been able to have a new outlook on the situation, by ensuring that organizations which are a part of the One Health platform, working on animal, environmental and human health are able to collaborate and coordinate through the group. The training helped improve coordination among RCCE One Health stakeholders, which has led to regular meetings being held at county and national levels.”

— Mr. Sampson G. Quedan, Nimba County Animal Health Surveillance Officer

Lessons Learned

The program found great value in transparency regarding ownership of processes, documents, and other activities among Government of Liberia stakeholders to avoid delays in the activity implementation timeline. Another key to the activity’s success was to ensure multisectoral engagement when planning activities by involving RCCE TWGs, other line ministries, county level focal points, and all relevant partners in the process.

Breakthrough ACTION continues to support the One Health platform to strengthen the capacity of national and subnational stakeholders and elevate RCCE issues to improve health outcomes.

For further information contact Jeremiah Kyne, SBC Program Officer, GHSA Activity (jkkyne2@jhu.edu) and Lindsey Leslie, SBC Advisor (LindseyLeslie@jhu.edu).

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.