

From Fear to Action: Engaging Local Voices to Combat Lassa Fever in Guinea

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In February 2024, Guinea reported two cases of Lassa fever, a zoonotic disease transmitted from rats to humans. One case tragically ended in death. The rapid spread of fear and misinformation created a need for effective social and behavior change to address disease prevention and widely spread accurate information.

“The woman who died was our sister.”

These poignant words from the president of a women’s group in Bardou reflect the profound personal impact of Lassa fever on communities in Guinea.

In response to this urgent situation, Breakthrough ACTION Guinea, in close partnership with the government and local communities, launched a strategic campaign to combat misinformation and raise public awareness about Lassa fever. The collaborators designed their response to address the crisis comprehensively and effectively.

By March, the project had rolled out an extensive campaign, using a blend of traditional and innovative communication methods. It broadcasted local radio ads three times daily for a month. The ads, translated into French and five local languages, reached provinces including Macenta, Nzérékoré, Yomou, Lola, Beyla, Guéckédou, Kissidougou, and Faranah. In addition to these broadcasts, the project organized community dialogues in collaboration with local leaders, health workers, and residents to foster open discussions about the disease and the benefits of seeking medical care.

In Bardou, the dialogues revealed the deep impact of the outbreak. The president of the women’s group shared the story of a woman who had lost her life despite seeking treatment in several locations. Her account highlighted the community’s fear and distrust, fueled by misinformation. She said women reported rumors like, “the body of our late husband had been burned,” and “[the bodies] had been stolen by health workers in complicity with the authorities.”



Through the combined efforts of Breakthrough ACTION Guinea, the government, and community partners, a positive shift began to take place. The president’s appreciation for the campaign’s clear information was evident as she pledged to promote the use of health facilities and counter misinformation. “We commit to visiting health facilities regularly and encouraging others to do the same,” she declared. “We understand that avoiding health services can pose serious risks, especially for children and pregnant women.”



An information sheet on Lassa fever shared in Guinea.

“We will never give time to unfounded rumors. We understand that staying away from health facilities is another serious danger, especially for children and pregnant women.

“Thank you and thank you once again for your kindness, for we were in the dark, enlightened by your messages.”

— President of the Bardou Women’s Group

This sentiment was echoed in Boola, where El Aboucar Sidiki Cisse, the second imam of the grand mosque, voiced his support for preventive measures. “Prevention is better than cure,” he affirmed, pledging to continue spreading awareness about Lassa fever prevention.

Since the launch of the campaign earlier this year, no new cases have been reported, marking a hopeful development in the fight against Lassa fever. With the disease causing significant annual mortality, Breakthrough ACTION Guinea, in partnership with the government and local communities, remains dedicated to ongoing engagement and the dissemination of accurate information to bolster public health resilience.

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