



CASE STUDY

Promoting Multisectoral Collaboration for Resilient Health Systems Through One Health Platforms

Lessons from Ethiopia, Liberia,
Nigeria, and Zambia



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Cover: Human-centered design research on Lassa fever with market sellers in Ondo state, Nigeria. Credit: Breakthrough ACTION.

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Acronyms

ACT	Advocacy, Communication, and Training
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GHS	Global Health Security
JEE	Joint External Evaluation
RCCE	Risk communication and community engagement
SBC	Social and behavior change
TORs	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical working group
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

In the complex realm of global health, the idea of health system resilience shines as a guiding principle, describing the ability of health entities, organizations, and communities to effectively navigate crises. At its core, resilience hinges on fostering collaboration across different sectors, breaking down traditional silos to create and implement robust preparedness and response strategies. Against this backdrop, Breakthrough ACTION undertook a significant initiative spanning 19 countries with the support of USAID Global Health Security (GHS) funding, using One Health platforms to strengthen health systems and enhance resilience to prevent, detect, and respond to priority zoonotic diseases (ZD) and other emerging infectious disease threats, like antimicrobial resistance. Diseases that spread between animals and people are ZD, and three-fourths

of emerging infectious diseases are ZD. This case study explores how Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, and Zambia promoted multisectoral collaboration to tackle ZD through their One Health platforms, offering valuable lessons that can be adapted by other countries.

The Results

Breakthrough ACTION's interventions yielded tangible results in enhancing preparedness, response, and post-crisis recovery within health systems. Regular multisectoral meetings played a crucial role in not only facilitating communication and improving coordination among health, agriculture, and environmental sectors—typically represented by the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, and Environment—but also coordinating joint data review forums to determine behavioral barriers



Credit: Breakthrough ACTION.

Inauguration of One Health Steering Committee and Launching of Documents in Abuja, Nigeria.

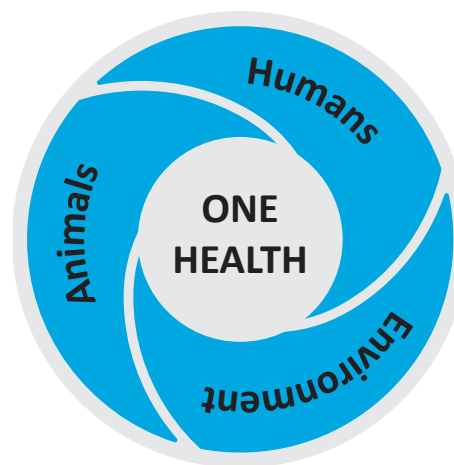
to prevention, detection, and response and plan activities accordingly, such as identifying key behavioral drivers and co-designing and developing risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) materials. They also serve as platforms for trainings and orientations. In addition to facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration, these forums strengthen cross-response functions, connecting RCCE to the work of the emergency operations center, surveillance/case finding, laboratory response, biosafety and biosecurity, infection prevention and control, and the universe of partners working on these different response functions. These meetings improve cross-sectoral and cross-functional response which ensures more effective disease monitoring and timely response.

RCCE activities empowered local communities to actively participate in health practices, contributing to broader resilience efforts. Involving communities led to quicker and more effective responses to outbreaks, curbing disease transmission and saving lives. These activities not only yielded immediate benefits but also hold promise for long-term improvements in health and development outcomes, including reduced morbidity and mortality rates and stronger, more resilient health systems.

Background Context

The One Health approach recognizes that human, animal, and environmental health are interconnected. Effective management of health threats requires coordinated actions across multiple sectors. While the

concept of One Health was not entirely new in the 19 countries of implementation where Breakthrough ACTION implemented this work, its operationalization presented challenges, especially in integrating various sectors such as health (human and animal), environment, and agriculture into a cohesive response framework.



Breakthrough ACTION has been at the forefront of promoting the One Health approach, ensuring diverse stakeholders work together to improve health outcomes and manage outbreaks more efficiently.

Key to this effort are social and behavior change (SBC) and RCCE, which link communities and decision makers in the human and animal health systems. By developing a trusted relationship with communities to better understand what the community experiences and providing timely and accurate health information, SBC and RCCE programs empower communities to effectively respond to crises and counter misinformation and disinformation during public health emergencies.



Credit: Breakthrough ACTION.

One Health Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Training in Nigeria.

In 2018, Breakthrough ACTION received initial funding from USAID GHS, in three countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia. Since then, the project expanded its One Health-related activities in 19 countries of implementation across different continents, addressing over 12 outbreaks of ZD in just 2023. This broad reach underscores the value of multisectoral collaboration and the development of RCCE strategies in strengthening health systems and enhancing resilience on a global scale.

Breakthrough ACTION's One Health Strategic Approach

In charting a course towards resilience, Breakthrough ACTION's strategy for fostering multisectoral collaboration

is meticulously designed to bolster resilience across national, subnational, and community levels. At the national level, the focus is on formalizing mechanisms for multisectoral coordination, typically using RCCE activities as the point of entry. Subnationally, efforts center on integrating surveillance systems for both human and animal health and supporting technical working groups (TWGs), where they exist, or establishing them where they do not. At the community level, the cornerstone is community engagement, empowering communities to actively participate in disease prevention and control.

Integral to this strategy is the fostering of partnerships and establishment of coordination bodies, weaving together Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Veterinary Sciences, local governments, community leaders, networks, and volunteers, and international organizations.

Through regular One Health TWG meetings, robust training programs, joint development of harmonized prevention messages, information-sharing platforms, and integrated data systems, Breakthrough ACTION collaborates with national governments and implementing partners to ensure coordinated collective action for better preparedness and response to emerging disease outbreaks.

Institutionalizing multisectoral meetings and integrated surveillance systems ensure One Health programs are sustainable. Ongoing training and capacity building maintain momentum, while continuous community engagement and education reinforce positive changes.

Locally, WhatsApp Groups and regularly scheduled TWG meetings accelerate and sustain cross-sectoral and multi-level exchange. Breakthrough ACTION has also adopted the peer assist technique, study tours, and annual learning exchange sessions to strengthen One Health platforms across multiple countries to address the evolving challenges posed by infectious disease outbreaks in their respective countries, while internally establishing virtual monthly coordination meetings and a repository of resources across the 19 countries of implementation. These knowledge management and communications platforms provide reliable and easy access to tools, resources, and opportunities for learning and exchange among government One Health stakeholders and the Breakthrough ACTION staff supporting them.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the benefit of embracing a culture of continuous learning and flexibility.

Nurturing relationships among stakeholders enhances the capacity for coordinated RCCE activities, leveraging resources, and avoiding duplication. Facilitating the engagement of diverse stakeholders to achieve common goals is critical for an effective health emergency response, along with capacity strengthening for One Health through formal workshops, mentorship, and learning-by-doing approaches.

These strategies empower countries to strengthen their One Health platforms for a coordinated response and build resilient health systems capable of withstanding future health threats. Experiences from Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, and Zambia highlight the vital role of multisectoral collaboration in addressing complex health challenges and ensuring global health security.

Country-Specific Examples

Ethiopia



Ethiopia adopted a comprehensive One Health approach to strengthen its health systems against ZD.

This has involved collaborative efforts between the human health, animal health, and environmental sectors. Key strategies included joint training programs for health workers from both sectors, the establishment of local One Health coordination TWG, and enhanced RCCE capacities. Through the support of USAID and initiatives like

Breakthrough ACTION, these efforts have improved coordination, knowledge sharing, and community engagement to raise awareness and promote early case reporting and preventive behaviors. The introduction of regional and woreda-level taskforces, supported by multi-channel communication and joint supportive supervision, ensured continuous technical assistance and real-time information sharing, crucial for effective outbreak response and management.

The results of these approaches have contributed to successes in Ethiopia's fight against ZD. Breakthrough ACTION increased RCCE capacity for One Health preparedness and response at national and subnational levels. The joint training and action planning have led to better coordination between health workers, enhanced community awareness, and increased early reporting of ZD cases. In Amhara's West Dembia Woreda, joint training for health and animal workers led to coordinated community education and rapid response to a rabies outbreak, preventing potential fatalities through timely medical intervention and effective animal management. Similarly, in Oromia's Dedessa Woreda, trained health workers quickly identified and managed an anthrax case, bringing unsafe practices to the attention of the community, thus making them partners in preventing the spread of the disease. These efforts, supported by local One Health coordination taskforces, highlighted the way joint training, community engagement, and multisectoral collaboration can enhance disease awareness, prevention, and outbreak response.

Zambia



In Zambia, Breakthrough ACTION established a One Health Advocacy, Communication, and Training (ACT) Technical

Working Group (TWG) to oversee RCCE activities at various levels. The project oriented TWG members on national guidelines and Terms of Reference (TORs), supported joint training on One Health, RCCE, and SBC. It also co-developed materials to address rabies and anthrax outbreaks. Breakthrough ACTION's activities enabled an effective response to the anthrax outbreak in late 2023, with key messages already co-developed and RCCE capacity of key stakeholders strengthened in advance. After the late 2023 outbreak, stakeholders recognized a need for improvements given another likely outbreak that will occur in 2024 due to the ongoing drought. Consequently, Breakthrough ACTION with multisectoral stakeholders participated in an after-action review, facilitated by the Zambia Public Health Institute, to develop an enhanced preparedness plan, ensuring better readiness across all sectors and structures.

Nigeria



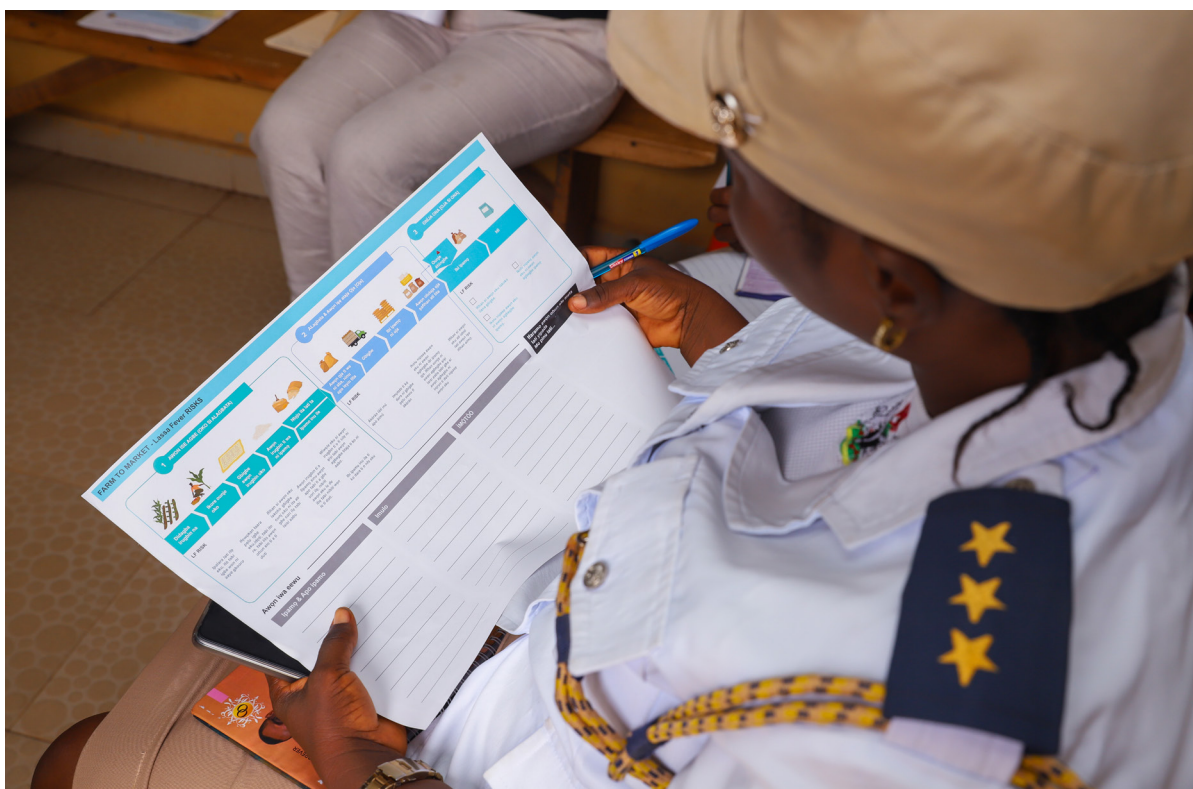
In Nigeria, Breakthrough ACTION provided SBC and RCCE support to complement government efforts

and address gaps identified by the World Health Organization's Joint External Evaluation (JEE). Central to this effort was establishing a robust governance structure through the National One

Health Steering Committee led by key ministerial leaders. The structure included rotational leadership to ensure balanced sectoral priorities. High-level advocacy helped lead to achieving a functional One Health structure, and Breakthrough ACTION's involvement in disease-specific TWGs facilitated the launch of strategic documents guiding RCCE activities. Breakthrough ACTION also worked cross-sectorally to conduct integrated research, such as a human-centered design exercise on Lassa fever and an mpox study, both of which further strengthened multi-sectors' understanding of the value of RCCE and led to the co-design and ownership of RCCE messages, materials, and activities.

To promote integration and leverage existing systems, Breakthrough ACTION emphasized a whole-of-society approach, supporting the establishment/expansion

and strengthening of coordination platforms using the One Health lens. This approach fostered inclusion through joint sectoral planning and co-branding, giving partners a sense of ownership and encouraging the use of shared materials. National approaches were contextualized at subnational levels, with subnational JEE and costed state action plans for health security. Breakthrough ACTION advocated for dedicated risk communication officers within health promotion units and incorporates RCCE into Rapid Response Deployment Teams to ensure effective emergency response. Both harmonizing reporting tools for RCCE activities across partners and showcasing the need to invest in RCCE highlight the power collaborative efforts have to enact and sustain improvements in One Health activities. Establishing the National One Health Risk Surveillance and Information Sharing



Credit: Breakthrough ACTION.

HCD research on Lassa fever with agricultural extension workers in Ondo state, Nigeria.

Group, a horizon-scanning group initiated for risk surveillance across the health-animal-environment interface, further enhanced the system's capacity to respond effectively to health emergencies.

Liberia



Breakthrough ACTION significantly contributed to strengthening Liberia's One Health framework, particularly by establishing the RCCE TWG. Initially,

the One Health governance lacked an RCCE TWG, but Breakthrough ACTION, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), revised the governance manual to include it. Breakthrough ACTION operates in 12 of Liberia's 15 counties, focusing on three priority diseases: rabies, bovine tuberculosis, and Lassa fever, while FAO covers the remaining three counties. Despite improvements in multisectoral coordination, challenges remain, particularly in integrating animal and environmental health sectors. Breakthrough ACTION has prioritized building RCCE capacity through national and subnational training programs, developing a national One Health Message Guide, and leveraging the Ministry of Health's "Healthy Life" brand to disseminate SBC materials, including ZD messages. Additionally, Breakthrough ACTION has collaborated with universities and youth organizations to enhance community engagement and supports other TWGs, especially in antimicrobial resistance initiatives.

Insights from Challenges and Solutions

Amidst achievements, Breakthrough ACTION faced significant challenges, including initial hesitancy to multisectoral collaboration since it was new to most ministries. Siloed mentalities, changes in political leadership, competing priorities, and resource constraints all threatened progress. However, through joint training sessions, workshops, and strategic partnerships, Breakthrough ACTION has supported its partners to effectively address these obstacles, showcasing the resilience inherent in collaborative efforts.

For example, in Zambia, Breakthrough ACTION supported the ACT TWGs at the subnational level, so they were able to develop action plans which prioritized RCCE activities. Such activities can ensure early detection and prevention. At a minimum, the jointly developed annual subnational action plans helped identify which ministries and partners plan to conduct which activities and, therefore, which entities have the resources necessary and where resources are lacking. Additionally, WhatsApp groups formed at national and subnational levels to promote immediate information sharing. These groups facilitate the dissemination of updates, reports, and other information pertinent to RCCE.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Reflecting on Breakthrough ACTION's journey unveils insights crucial for future endeavors. Lessons learned included the following:

- **Effective communication channels are fundamental for coordinated outbreak response.** Regular joint meetings and information-sharing platforms enhance real-time data exchange and decision making.
- **Building trust through joint activities and shared training enhances collaboration and improves outbreak management.** Mutual understanding and respect lead to effective multisectoral coordination.
- **Integrated surveillance systems provide a comprehensive overview of health threats, enabling early detection and more effective responses.** Cross-sectoral data integration enables timely outbreak management.
- **The success of One Health initiatives depends on community engagement and education.** Informed and involved communities contribute significantly to disease prevention and control efforts.

Effective communication, trust-building, and community engagement were fundamental to the project's success, while challenges highlighted a need for resilience and adaptability. Moving forward, institutionalized mechanisms for multisectoral coordination and integrated surveillance systems promise to sustain progress.

Recommendations

Drawing from its experience, Breakthrough ACTION offers actionable advice for others embarking on similar paths with One Health platforms.

- **Establish Clear TORs and Memoranda of Understanding for Various Stakeholder Groups and TWGs:** Create clear roles and responsibilities outlined in guidance documents and identify processes and tools for engagement. This will make One Health TWGs and their meetings more functional and action-oriented. Users must understand these TORs and guidelines clearly, both at the national level and

the subnational and community levels. Guidance materials provide a common focus for the operationalization of One Health platforms, allowing and encouraging the contributions of the different disciplines and expertise.

- **Facilitate Regular Multisectoral Meetings:** Ensure continuous communication and information sharing between sectors. Although the COVID-19 pandemic led to increasing One Health stakeholders' comfort with using WhatsApp and virtual meetings than ever before, regularly scheduled in-person meetings help strengthen relationships between members of stakeholder groups. The frequency of these meetings may be weekly, if in the midst of an outbreak,



Credit: Breakthrough ACTION.

HCD research team reviewing user feedback on SBC materials on Lassa fever.

or monthly to every other month, depending on the agenda. These meetings help stakeholders transition from being reactive to events to being prepared and responsive, especially in anticipation of seasonal outbreaks.

- **Foster Trust and Mutual Understanding:** This requires time and sustained effort over many years. Joint action planning sessions, joint training workshops, and regular orientations foster collaborative relationships based on a shared understanding of different stakeholders' roles, abilities, and constraints and mutual respect.
- **Strengthen RCCE Systems:** Develop systems for collecting and sharing real-time listening data from communities, whether by paper or electronically, and make sure that this data is shared across human, animal, and

environmental health sectors to inform the response.

- **Engage Communities:** Prioritize community education and involvement to enhance preventive measures and outbreak response.

By adopting these strategies, countries can strengthen their One Health platforms and build more resilient health systems capable of withstanding future health threats.

Conclusion

In the complex landscape of global health security, the intersection of human, animal, and environmental health presents opportunities for transformation. Through collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management informed by real-time data sharing, Breakthrough ACTION and its partners have paved a path towards resilience, turning challenges into opportunities and advancing the vision of One Health platforms in Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and beyond.

By fostering effective communication, building trust, integrating surveillance systems, and engaging communities, these countries have developed more resilient health systems capable of managing outbreaks more effectively. The lessons learned from these initiatives provide a valuable framework for other countries seeking to enhance their health system resilience through multisectoral collaboration.



Credit: Breakthrough ACTION.

Mambwe One Health Advocacy, Communication, and Training (ACT) Technical Working Group (TWG) members during World Zoonoses Day in 2024 in Zambia.