

Bridging Silos

Enhancing Public Health Outcomes Through Zambia's One Health Approach

Case Study
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Table of Contents

- Acronyms ii**
- Background 1**
- The Strategy 1**
- Improvements and Outcomes 2**
- Role of Technology 3**
- Challenges and Sustainability 3**
- Lessons Learned and Next Steps 4**
- Conclusion 5**

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Acronyms

ACT	Advocacy, communication, and training
GHS	Global Health Security
RCCE	Risk communication and community engagement
TORs	Terms of reference
TWG	Technical working group
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZNPHI	Zambia National Public Health Institute

Background

In 2023, Zambia launched its 2022–2026 [One Health Strategic Plan](#), marking a significant advancement in public health security. Prior to this plan, key government ministries operated in silos, which resulted in minimal multisectoral collaboration and coordination, particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. This lack of coordination was a major challenge, as the response was largely shouldered by the human health sector alone.

Recognizing this key challenge, the One Health Strategic Plan introduced five technical working groups, including the One Health Advocacy, Communication, and Training (ACT) Technical Working Group (TWG). This group aims to develop and implement community and advocacy strategies in addition to improving the coordination of One Health risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) activities across national and subnational levels, ensuring communities receive timely information on risk mitigation and prevention, especially during public health emergencies and zoonotic disease outbreaks.

What is One Health?

One Health is an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, and ecosystems.¹ It recognizes the intersection of animal, human, and environmental health and provides a roadmap to respond to public health outbreaks especially of a zoonotic nature. This approach relies on communication, collaboration, coordination, and effective governance at all levels.

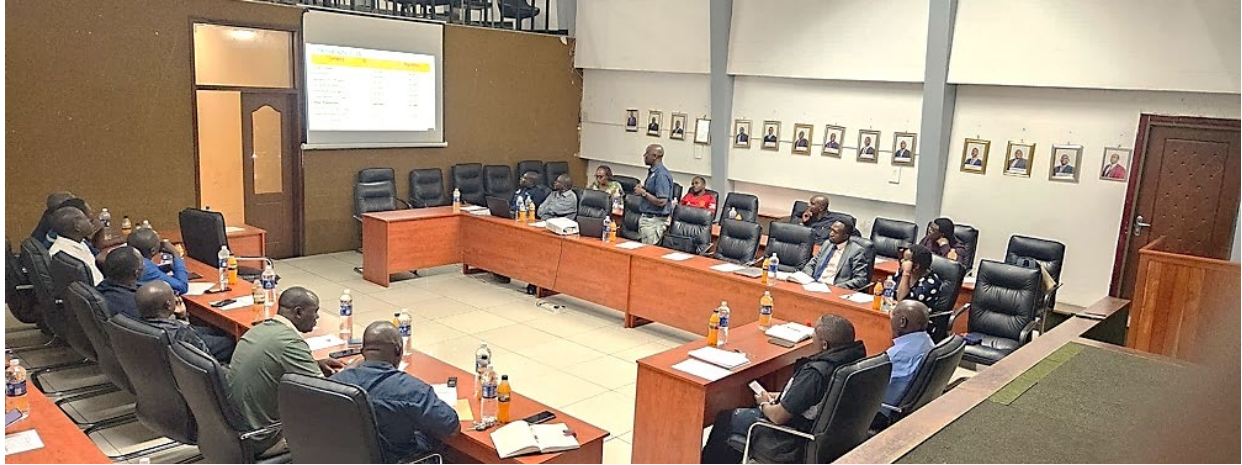
In Zambia, the collaborative efforts of Breakthrough ACTION and the Zambia National Public Health Institute resulted in establishing the National One Health Advocacy, Communication, and Training Technical Working Group.

The Strategy

The One Health ACT TWG was established with formal appointments of national focal points from key One Health line ministries, such as the Ministries of Health, Fisheries and Livestock, Agriculture, Water and Sanitation, Tourism (Department of National Parks and Wildlife), and Local Government and Rural Development. Formal communication between the Zambia National Public Health Institute (ZNPHI) Director General and Permanent Secretaries of the respective ministries formalized these appointments.

Breakthrough ACTION supported these focal points by helping them develop terms of reference (TORs) which outlined their roles and responsibilities, informed by the Zambia One Health Strategic Plan and experiences from other countries. This included a comprehensive three-day meeting where the national focal points drafted the TORs for the national, provincial, and district levels, later finalized through consultative engagements.

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *One Health*. <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/index.html>



One Health Orientation meeting in Chingola. Credit: Breakthrough ACTION Zambia

At the subnational level, establishing TWGs followed a phased approach, starting with advocacy visits at the provincial level and extending to the district level. These visits included USAID Global Health Security (GHS) and ZNPFI leadership. This approach also involved engaging local leadership, including explaining the One Health approach and the importance of coordinated RCCE efforts. These engagements were crucial for building support and understanding of the TWGs' role in public health emergency preparedness and response.

Following these advocacy visits and through the provincial and district administration offices, collaborators identified and formally appointed focal points from key ministries and departments as members of the One Health ACT TWG to coordinate and implement One Health RCCE activities. Following their appointments, Breakthrough ACTION, working with the National One Health ACT TWG, oriented the subnational-level TWG members on the One Health approach, RCCE, and the TORs of each member of the TWG. This orientation helped TWG members understand One Health RCCE activities for effectively implementation.

Improvements and Outcomes

The formation of the One Health ACT TWG has markedly improved coordination among different ministries and departments. The TWG provides a platform for multisectoral collaboration, allowing diverse stakeholders to work together effectively. For instance, during emergencies, such as the recent anthrax outbreak, the involvement of multiple ministries enabled a more comprehensive response, pooling resources such as vehicles, vaccines, and human resources.

The formulation of [the ACT TWG] through the One Health approach has really made it easy to coordinate various ministries and departments at both national and subnational levels.

— National ACT TWG Member

At the community level, the TWGs have been instrumental in coordinating efforts during outbreaks of diseases like rabies and anthrax. By involving local leaders and health ministry officials, these groups have enhanced community outreach and response efforts.

Role of Technology

The use of technology, particularly WhatsApp groups, has significantly facilitated communication and information sharing among stakeholders. This platform is particularly useful, as many stakeholders only check emails during working hours. WhatsApp allows for real-time updates and quick dissemination of critical information, which is essential during public health emergencies.

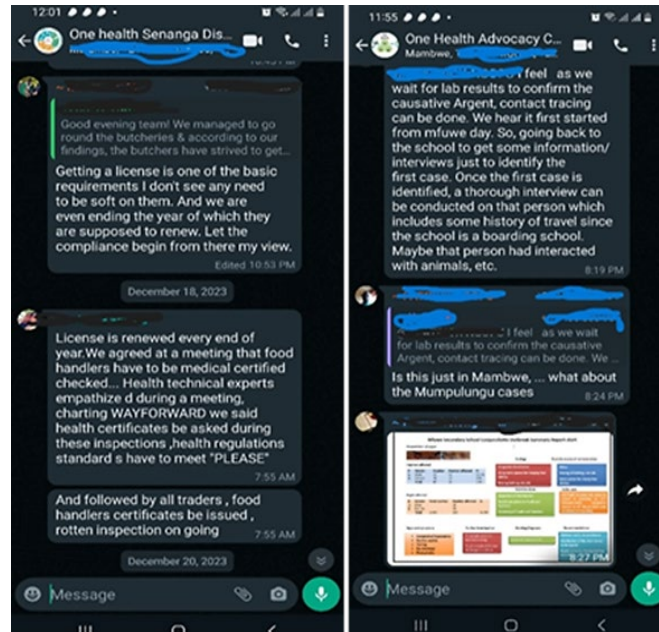


Figure 1. Examples of WhatsApp conversation groups for One Health stakeholders.

Challenges and Sustainability

Despite these advancements, the implementation of the One Health Strategic Plan has faced several challenges:

- **Coordination Gaps:** While structures are established on paper, their functionality remains limited. Key components of the One Health structure are not fully operational.
- **Siloed Mentalities:** Some ministries continue to operate independently, sometimes even developing contradictory materials in response to health threats.
- **Information Dissemination Issues:** Effective dissemination of One Health materials and strategic plans to subnational levels has been inadequate, leading to confusion about roles and responsibilities.
- **Financial Constraints:** Dedicated government funding for One Health activities is lacking. Much of the existing support comes from partners like the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNICEF, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (including through Breakthrough ACTION).

To address these challenges and enhance coordination, Breakthrough ACTION has helped the TWGs develop action plans prioritizing RCCE activities. These plans ensure ministries and partners are aware of planned activities, available resources, and existing gaps. Additionally, WhatsApp groups at both national and subnational levels promote immediate information sharing.



Community meeting in the Copperbelt. Credit: Breakthrough ACTION Zambia

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Establishing structures at both national and subnational levels has underscored the value of a cascading approach to capacity building. This approach, where the national-level ACT TWG trains the provincial level, which in turn trains the district level, has been instrumental for disseminating knowledge and skills across different layers of government. This method has effectively empowered various levels to implement RCCE activities more efficiently.

Another crucial lesson learned is that establishing formal structures with clearly defined roles and responsibilities enhances accountability and ensures structured coordination. By appointing focal point persons to represent each ministry or department in the TWGs, the initiative facilitated smoother coordination and ensured comprehensive representation from all key line ministries.

Furthermore, the involvement and support of high-level leadership, especially in newly integrated provinces or districts, have enabled the smooth implementation of RCCE activities. This top-down endorsement ensures the initiatives receive the necessary backing and resources.

Enhancing the capacity of local media professionals has improved coordinated behavior change communication and risk communication within private media outlets. As a result, media coverage of priority zoonotic diseases, particularly anthrax and rabies, has notably increased.

To build on these successes, local stakeholders must continue expanding the One Health ACT TWGs across the country and enhance the capacity of subnational structures for improved coordination and

implementation of RCCE activities. Continuous engagement and capacity building are essential for maintaining momentum and effectiveness in these efforts.

Enhancing coordination requires fostering genuine multisectoral collaboration that goes beyond mere structural setups. Regular and structured meetings and updates maintain alignment and coherence among the various stakeholders. Addressing the tendency for siloed operations by encouraging and implementing activities that require joint action plans and shared outcomes among all relevant ministries and departments will further promote cohesive and unified efforts.

Finally, the continued success and sustainability of these initiatives depends upon ongoing engagement with leaders at both the national and subnational levels. Their involvement ensures that stakeholders at all levels of governance prioritize and support the coordination and collaboration efforts.



Summary of next steps

- Expand the establishment of One Health ACT TWGs across the country.
- Build the capacity of subnational structures to coordinate and implement RCCE activities.
- Foster genuine multisectoral collaboration beyond mere structural setup, encouraging joint action plans and shared outcomes among all relevant ministries and departments.
- Continue to engage leaders at both national and subnational levels to support these efforts.

Conclusion

This case study underscores how multisectoral coordination, as facilitated by the One Health approach, enhances health outcomes by ensuring comprehensive, coordinated, and timely responses to public health emergencies, thus safeguarding the health of people, animals, and ecosystems alike.