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# USAID INTEGRATED HEALTH SERVICES ACTIVITY (IHSA)

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2020

## Message from the Project Director regarding the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Readers,

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced every country to take drastic response measures. In Benin, the Government has acted swiftly with restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. The scale and unique nature of this crisis requires that essential routine health services continue to be provided at all times—especially high-impact services that reduce maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent girls' mortality and morbidity. With USAID funding, the Integrated Health Services Activity (IHSA) will continue to support the Government of Benin, including infection prevention and control measures and referrals and counter-referrals to support the continuity of health services.

This newsletter presents how the Activity is adapting its interventions to the current situation and the important results of our efforts from October 2019 to March 2020.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Floride Niyuhire  
Program Director, USAID Integrated Health Services Activity

### *An adaptation of activities on the ground*

Between January and March 2020, the USAID Integrated Health Services Activity coached 363 health agents, including 226 women, in 74 health facilities to improve the quality of health services. Working with quality assurance teams from Health Zones, these coaching visits focused on ensuring compliance of health providers to clinical guidelines of the Ministry of Public Health in the priority health services, which are malaria prevention and treatment, maternal-newborn and child care, family planning and gender-based violence, and compliance for collecting and reporting accurate data. The team was able to carry out these coaching visits by putting an emphasis on general infection prevention measures, such as preventive measures to take against the spread of health care-acquired infections and efforts to communicate this to the population. These measures include regular hand washing before and after patient examination, waste management, sterilizing medical material, and providing advice to patients such handwashing.

## A number of important meetings to launch 2020

On February 5–6, the IHSA team welcomed Mr. Carl Anderson, USAID Benin Country Representative, to the north of the country and provided him with an overview of the first year of the Activity's implementation. Mr. Anderson also took the opportunity to meet with local political and health authorities and praised IHSA for its technical assistance focused on sustainability. During the same month, the President and CEO of Management Sciences for Health (MSH), Ms. Marian Wentworth, came to Benin to see the evolution of the project. Ms. Wentworth received a warm welcome from staff and local authorities. She met multiple members of the Ministry of Health; USAID representatives; and

local elected officials of the Department of Ouémé, including the Mayor of Dangbo, where IHSA provides support to strengthen community health management. Ms. Wentworth also visited the health center at Aholouyèmè, where she saw first-hand the work of the project on the ground. Ms. Wentworth indicated how impressed she was with IHSA's work and identified a number of activities that could serve as examples for the entire MSH organization, including the systematic use of root cause analysis and action planning to drive programming of corrective actions for improving the quality of services in health facilities.



USAID delegation and IHSA team in the north of the country. Photo credit: Tyler Chau, US Embassy to Benin

## Supporting women's financial autonomy for better health care



Women's group processing palm nuts into red oil (Photo credit: IHSA)

IHSA is supporting women' entrepreneur groups in the departments of Plateau and Atacora, with the aim of building women's financial independence through income-generating activities (IGAs) and promoting good, healthy lives. Since January 2020, 207 women (124 in Plateau and 83 in Atacora) have been coached on identifying and implementing IGAs, including the processing of soybeans into by-products, cassava into gari (a fermented paste), and palm nuts into palm oil; learning new techniques to dry rice; and producing liquid soap. IHSA collaborated with local midwives to educate the women on maternal and newborn health, family planning, and the importance of creating a group savings fund for health emergencies. These health promotion efforts also targeted village leaders, who subsequently took the initiative to guide patients within their communities toward health facilities after receiving health education.

## Citizen engagement in the commune of Dangbo



The mayor of Dangbo welcoming the President and CEO of MSH

Building on work from its first year of implementation, IHSA continues to support local officials, such as mayors and municipal advisors, to mobilize municipal resources for health. In Year 2,

activities are focusing on supporting communes to plan their community health spending based on priorities, with financing from Benin's Commune Development Support Funds (Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes - FADeC). For example, with technical assistance from IHSA, the 2020 budget for Dangbo commune, (Ouémé department), now includes funds for identifying, recruiting, supervising, and monitoring community health workers. Praising IHSA's assistance, the Mayor of Dangbo, Mr. Maoudo Djossou, mentioned to MSH CEO Marian Wentworth, "IHSA has brought a lot to the town hall of Dangbo. They provided us with information about community health Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes (FADeC) and the availability of these funds to communes, and they supported us to better plan activities covered by this fund."

## AlafiaComm: Launching a community health mobile app

Marking a major step in its development, IHSA presented its AlafiaComm mobile application for community health workers to the National Directorate of Public Health (DNSP) and the National Directorate of Planning and Prospection (DPP) on February 27, 2020. This meeting allowed Beninese authorities to review the app's effectiveness as a tool for improved case and

patient data management and its alignment with the national health information system. The review will be followed by a skills transfer phase, with a final transition of the ownership, hosting, and management of AlafiaComm to the national data center in the last quarter of 2020.



IHSA presenting AlafiaComm during a monitoring committee meeting with the DNSP, DPP, and NGO PIHI-com. Photo credit: Sarah Sagan, Dimagi

## Donating medical equipment with Project C.U.R.E.

As part of its cost share commitment, IHSA partnered with Project C.U.R.E. to deliver donated medical products and equipment worth \$2,082,268 to hospitals and health centers in all four IHSA-supported departments (Atacora, Alibori, Plateau, and Ouémé). Donated supplies include treatment tables and chairs, surgical instrument kits, obstetrics and gynecological surgery packs, lab supply kits, gloves, masks, and sterilization and disinfectant supplies.

On December 11, 2019, the Aholouyèmè Health Center in Ouémé, one of the recipients, hosted an official ceremony to acknowledge this large-scale donation. Ceremony participants included health staff from the health center; the Deputy Director of the Cabinet of the Ministry of Health, Ms. Eléonore Armande Gandjeto; the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for West Africa and Security Affairs of the US Department of State, Ms. Whitney Baird; and the Ambassador for the United States in Benin, Ms. Patricia Mahoney; as well as the USAID health team and IHSA members.



(from left) the US Ambassador to Benin, the Assistant Undersecretary of the Office of African Affairs of the Department of State, the IHSA Project Director, and the USAID Team Lead



IHSA (middle) and *Direction Départementale de la Santé* of Atacora (right) staff receive the donation

### About the Activity

The USAID-funded Integrated Health Services Activity (IHSA) is a five-year project implemented in Benin. The purpose of IHSA is to strengthen local expertise in delivering high-impact malaria, family planning, maternal and child health (MCH), and gender-based violence (GBV) services with strong citizen engagement to reduce maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent girls' mortality and morbidity.

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