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Photo credit: Jocelyn Akakpo

# USAID INTEGRATED HEALTH SERVICES ACTIVITY

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2021

## Collaborating to ensure high-impact health services despite COVID-19

Dear readers,

When we were developing the previous newsletter, the COVID-19 pandemic was already spreading around the world, leading to dreadful health, economic, and social consequences. Nine months later, societies, communities, and families continue to suffer from the consequences of the virus.

However, in spite of this unprecedented danger, the Government of Benin has been resilient in tackling this challenge and protecting the country's population. Collaborating closely with state and local governments, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Integrated Health Services Activity supported the departments where it is working to establish a platform to coordinate actions to combat the virus. The Activity has also supported their *Direction Départementale de la Santé* to assess the resources needed to effectively combat this pandemic and provided a training of trainers on standard procedures to build capacity in infection prevention and control and COVID-19 surveillance.

This active and fruitful collaboration among stakeholders helped to not only respond to the pandemic in a timely manner but also to ensure continuity to offer high-impact health services that will reduce maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent mortality and morbidity.

In this third newsletter, I would like to commend the national and local authorities, USAID, the Global Fund, and all of our implementing partners and agents involved in this work.

Happy reading to all,

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

## The 2020 Seasonal Malaria Chemoprevention Campaign

While the rainy season brings welcome relief to farmers in northern Benin, the wet weather also brings unwelcomed guests: mosquitoes. These mosquitoes can spread malaria, which threatens the lives of thousands of children in the region. Since 2019, health agents supported by the Activity have been treating children with four rounds of seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC), which reduced cases by up to 50% during the 2019 campaign. In 2020, in partnership with Catholic Relief Services, the Activity has supported the *Programme National de Lutte contre le Paludisme* (PNLP) in launching a mobile app to ease data collection, improve accuracy, and facilitate real-time decision making. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Activity put in place new safety protocols for its 1,500 health workers and required the use of masks, hand sanitizer, and soap. Protected and armed with smartphones, community health workers provided treatment to 302,448 children, with a 95% coverage rate. Despite the challenges with the app and COVID-19, the 2020 SMC campaign achieved similar success as the previous year in Malanville-Karimama and Tanguiéta-Matéri-Cobly.



A health worker showing the app used during the SMC in the village of Guéné. Photo credit: Jocelyn Akakpo

## Supporting gender-based violence survivors

In December 2020, Dr. Omer Adjibode, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Advisor for the Activity, facilitated a roundtable discussion with Ms. Patricia Mahoney, U.S. Ambassador to Benin, on support provided to GBV survivors. Health and social workers, police officers, and the General Prosecutor of the court of appeal of Cotonou participated in this event, which focused on how to more effectively support GBV survivors through social and economic

reintegration. Support to GBV survivors is a key area of focus for the Activity, which trained 150 people in the departments of Ouémé and Alibori on medical, psychosocial, and legal support in 2020. Thanks to the work achieved by the Activity and partners in the public sector, 68 survivors have already received material support for better employment opportunities, which are critical for breaking the cycles of GBV.



Photo of the roundtable participants. Left to right: Ms. Jenelle Norin, USAID/Benin Health Office Director; Dr. Omer Adjibode, GBV Advisor for the Activity, Ms. Patricia Mahoney, U.S. Ambassador to Benin; Mr. David Samson Dossou, social worker – head of the support line for the community development centers of Bonou; Dr. Souwébatou Salou, *Médecin Chef* of the health center of Sèmè-Podji; Mr. Dassoundo Ahiffon, General Prosecutor of the court of Appeal of Cotonou; Mr. Fatembo Tchango, Police Superintendent and Deputy-Director for the police in Ouémé; and Ms. Alison Davis, Political Advisor, U.S. Embassy Benin. Photo credit: Karl Job / U.S. Embassy Benin

## Assessing and strengthening the quality of malaria, maternal, and neonatal care

On-site training and supportive supervision (OTSS) is an approach that engages health management teams to train medical providers in enhanced clinical case management practices, thereby strengthening the capacity of health teams and improving patient care. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Activity continued to provide technical assistance to health zones using OTSS to improve the quality of malaria case management and pregnancy monitoring in Activity-supported departments. With regard to malaria, trainers helped to establish Quality Improvement Teams to help respond to and correct identified gaps and challenges within each facility. As a result of this work, the percentage of health zones with the minimum level required to perform rapid diagnostic tests increased from 68% in December 2019 to 91% in September 2020.

The efforts made by the health zone teams, with support from the Activity, to strengthen maternal and neonatal care have also been very important. Coaching visits conducted in Coby to promote the antenatal (ANC) calendar at both the health facility and community levels as well as efforts to revise prenatal check-up services to reduce costs, with the health zone subsidizing the difference (from

11,200 francs (just over 20 USD) to 4,500 CFA francs (just over 8 USD)) have led to encouraging results. The attendance rate for the first ANC visit increased from 21% in 2018 to 42% in 2019, while for the fourth ANC visit it increased from 9% in 2018 to 27% in 2019. Out of all the women who performed their first ANC visit, the percentage of women performing their required antenatal laboratory testing increased from 9% in 2018 to 13% in 2020.



A coach in the health zone of Sakété-Ifangni (Plateau) counting the number of active malaria cases in the health facility. Photo Credit: Raphaël Gnonlonfoun

## Launch of the AlafiaComm pilot

On November 1, 2020, the Activity launched a pilot of AlafiaComm, a community health mobile application that enables efficient and rapid management of cases and patient data. Between September and October 2020, 75 people, including 50 community health workers (CHWs), were trained on the application. The pilot phase will be an opportunity to test the application in the field with users

(CHWs and chef de poste), collect feedback on the tool, set up a digital system to monitor CHWs, and provide technical support to users to ensure the smooth running of the application. Between November 1 and December 31, 2020, CHWs completed 3,967 submissions through the application, which highlights the interest and buy-in for this tool moving forward.



Training of 23 CHWs in the health zone of Pobè-Adja-Ouèrè-Kétou. Photo Credit: Victor Sokou

## Calling on the private sector to improve health infrastructure

Abadago, a town in the department of Plateau, used to have a hut within its health center that was used as a waiting area for women coming in to vaccinate their children, attending antenatal and postnatal care visits, or seeking family planning services. Unfortunately, the hut was damaged and washed away by rain in October 2019, which ultimately affected the continuity of health services for that facility.

The Government of Benin's objective is to empower communities to take ownership in ensuring quality healthcare for their population. As such, the Activity provided technical support and training to stakeholders in Abadago on canvassing, negotiation, and advocacy strategies. Because of these efforts, the municipality was able to secure funding from a private donor to reconstruct the health facility hut using stronger and higher quality materials to withstand the rains. The reconstruction of the hut has led to a marked improvement in patient comfort and compliance with hygiene measures. The facility's attendance rate increased by 6 percentage points between July 2019 and December 2020, with an increase in vaccination coverage from 75% to 97% for the same period.



A hut similar to the old one used as a waiting room (left) and a health center nurse in front of the newly constructed building (right). Photo credit: Barnabé Tchoudji

### About the Activity

The USAID-funded Integrated Health Services Activity is a five-year project implemented in Benin. The purpose of the Integrated Health Services Activity 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.

This document is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) cooperative agreement no. 72068018CA00001. The contents are the responsibility of Management Sciences for Health and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.