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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



A community health worker (CHW) explains the importance of the seasonal malaria chemoprevention campaign to a mother and how to give the malaria treatment in Guénè (Alibori). Photo Credit: Dr. Jocelyn Akakpo

USAID INTEGRATED HEALTH SERVICES ACTIVITY

NEWSLETTER

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Leaving no one on the COVID-19 vaccination sidelines!

Dear readers,

While the world faces a surge in COVID-19 cases and fears the emergence of new variants, the need for mass vaccination of the population is essential to avoid the occurrence of severe cases and deaths.

In addition to social distancing, vaccination is the most effective way to contain COVID-19. For this reason, Benin officially started its vaccination campaign on March 29, 2021.

Since then, the government has launched many initiatives to vaccinate the entire population, including the first phase of the mass vaccination campaign that took place between November and December. The objective, according to State

Minister Adboulaye Bio Tchané—responsible for developing and coordinating the government's action—was to provide vaccines “in every commune and every district of our country to ensure equity in the offer of vaccines to all Beninese people.”

As you will read in this newsletter, this campaign paid off and we are proud, within the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Integrated Health Services Activity, to support the Government of Benin in the fight to end this pandemic.

Happy reading to all.

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

Reassure the population regarding the vaccination

Misinformation on the unwanted or protective effects of the COVID-19 vaccine spread quickly and created apprehension for vaccine uptake. As a result, the Ministry of Health developed a mitigation and communication plan for all departments with support from the Activity to strengthen messaging and to help disseminate accurate information about vaccines, counter rumors, and accelerate the adherence of the population to COVID-19 vaccination.

The Activity also provided technical support to implement action items from the plan directly in the field. The Activity worked with local leaders by providing awareness sessions on vaccination benefits and information on places where people can get vaccinated. 2,205 local leaders participated in these sessions, including 941 in the department of Atacora, 425 in Alibori, 580 in Ouémé, and 259 in Plateau.

Between November and December 2021, the 4 Activity-supported departments almost reached or exceeded the campaign's target, enabling 424,793 eligible people in the 4 departments to be fully vaccinated, representing 21.46% of the population in the 4 departments. The Activity will continue its COVID-19 awareness activities through extended outreach efforts to include youth, women, taxi drivers, and teachers.



A person getting vaccinated in the health center of Sèmè-Podji. Photo credit: Azick Sèmèho GNanhoui

Supporting quality of care improvement teams

Quality of health care doesn't depend solely on the individual competencies of health staff, but also on the system or institution in which the staff are working and operating in. For this reason, quality improvement teams (EAQs)—due to the collective approach of these units—represent a strategic pillar in improving the offer of quality services in health facilities.

In 2021, the Activity supported the implementation of 153 EAQs in the 4 departments by training them on their roles and responsibilities as well as on expectations from these units such as meeting monthly to review and discuss the implementation of the quality improvement plan, indicators, and existing problems.

The Activity also provided monitoring support to 222 EAQs, representing a total of 1,159 health staff in all 4 departments to assess the well-functioning of these facilities. Out of the 222 facilities, 108 did not implement all the necessary recommendations for an effective functioning of EAQs. As a result, coaches provided additional support to promote team work and remind EAQs to hold monthly meetings, as well as document changes in the quality of care implemented by EAQs and data usage by the health center to update the quality improvement plans.

Malaria Prevention Campaign Protects Thousands of Children



An IT specialist explains to CHWs how to charge a smartphone using a backpack equipped with a solar panel in Karimama (Alibori). Photo Credit: Dr. Jocelyn Akakpo

Since 2019, the Activity has supported tech implementation of the annual SMC campaigns in Benin. These campaigns take place in the northern departments and target children between 3 and 59 months to prevent them from getting sick by providing a full antimalarial treatment during the time of the year where malaria transmission is highest in the region.

For the second year in a row, a digital tool was used during this campaign to collect and share data in real time. This app not only simplified the collection of data and monitoring of health agents, but also helped decrease the number of paper-based documents and simplified data storage.

The 2021 campaign was implemented in six health zones, including Tanguiéta-Matéri-Cobly (TMC, Atacora) and Malanville-Karimama (MK, Alibori), which are supported by the Activity. At the end of this 4-month campaign, 63,919 children between 3 and 59 months received malaria treatment in the two zones with an average coverage rate of 96.5% in TMC and 91.40% in MK.

Enabling the professional reintegration of gender-based violence (GBV) survivors

GBV is a major public health threat. In addition to the physical and psychological trauma endured, many survivors of GBV often find themselves facing tremendous financial hardships due to lack of resources and opportunities available to them.

In Benin, thanks to the National Relief Initiative, the Ministry of Social Affairs provides a financial support to vulnerable people including GBV survivors. Unfortunately, due to a lack of financing, many survivors don't have access to this support. For these reasons, the Activity—in collaboration with the *centres de promotion sociale*, the organizations responsible for selecting National Relief candidates—provides support to GBV survivors to develop income-generating activities. In the department of Atacora, 40 GBV survivors were selected out of a total of 54 proposals to benefit from this support. The needs expressed by the selected survivors included support to develop their businesses, transforming raw produce into processed food, and material and equipment to set up hairdressing, sewing, and weaving workshops. After an Activity-led training held in September and October 2021 on income-generating activities,

survivors received the needed supplies to start their small businesses.

Following the training, beneficiaries thanked the Activity for the support provided. One of the beneficiaries from Cobly said: “I would like to thank this project that enabled me today to practice my work as a tailor—work for which I was trained to do but could not practice due to a lack of resources. I am really happy and wish to say a big thank you.”



Sewing material offered by the Activity to a GBV survivor of Cobly on October 13, 2021. Photo credit: Modest Gnitona

About the USAID Integrated Health Services 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.

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