



SEPTEMBER 2022

A person being vaccinated at the Sèmè-Podji health center. Photo Credit: Azick Sèmèho Gnanhoui

USAID INTEGRATED HEALTH SERVICES ACTIVITY

INCREASED CAPACITY OF THE BENINESE HEALTH SYSTEM AND COMMUNITIES TO PREVENT AND CONTROL COVID-19

Since March 2020, Benin has been facing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has become a priority for the country's health system. It is important to note and acknowledge the resilience of the Government of Benin in tackling this challenge and protecting the country's population. Working closely with the Government, its partners, and local governments, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Integrated Health Services Activity (IHSA), implemented by Management Sciences for Health and its partner DEDRAS, supported the four departments of implementation (Atacora, Alibori, Ouémé, and Plateau) in combatting the pandemic. This support included capacity building for COVID-19 infection prevention and control (IPC) and accelerating widespread access to vaccines through awareness-raising efforts.

BUILDING CAPACITY TO PREVENT AND CONTROL COVID-19 IN SUPPORTED AREAS

IHSA worked with the government to build capacity and coordination among all stakeholders to contain COVID-19 and support the implementation of a surveillance system in each department of implementation in collaboration with the Departmental Health Directorate (DDS), town halls, and prefectures.

- This support resulted in the training of 376 head nurses and hygiene officers in the supported health zones on IPC measures, including the definition of COVID-19 cases and the establishment of a triage system for patients suspected of being infected in the health facilities. In addition, 3,351 people were trained in strengthening epidemiological surveillance, contact tracing, and case reporting.
- Rapid response teams and IHSA supported 26 Communal Health Crisis Management Committees to implement IPC activities in response to COVID-19 to act effectively and assist the population in a safe manner.
- The project provided protective equipment against infection to community health workers and vulnerable people, as these populations often do not have the means to protect themselves effectively. A donation in 2021 included 25,786 cloth face masks, 26,737 bottles of hand sanitizer, 417,000 surgical face masks, 740,000 latex gloves, 169 megaphones, and 96 small and 4 large handwashing devices.
- Awareness-raising campaigns were conducted with the support of the project on key prevention messages in the four departments to encourage the target groups to strictly apply the preventive measures in their work and living environments. Between November 2020 and June 2021, 1,870 community stakeholders (town criers, village chiefs, and religious leaders) and 2,714 members of Child Care and Protection Centers were provided with awareness-raising guidance. In addition, information sessions were organized by Social Promotion Centers and head nurses with support from IHSA and attended by 5,973 participants, and awareness-raising messages were broadcast on local radio stations.
- Finally, IHSA supported an assessment that made it possible to build an initial database to guide supervision and coaching in 274 health facilities. Several proposals for improvement were made following the assessment, including the adoption of a patient triage system, a reminder of the World Health Organization's recommendations on handwashing techniques, and waste management.

ACCELERATING WIDESPREAD AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINES

Vaccination against COVID-19 remains one of the most reliable ways to control the virus. The Ministry of Health is working with its partners to make vaccine doses available in an equitable manner in all communes. Unfortunately, acquiring vaccines was not the only challenge Benin faced: misinformation about the positive and negative effects of vaccines spread rapidly and created apprehension surrounding vaccine uptake. The project supports the Ministry of Health in prioritizing communication and information on the efficacy, safety, and importance of COVID-19 vaccines.

- IHSA designed and conducted a joint assessment of the challenges related to the demand for and use of the COVID-19 vaccine with each DDS. Based on this assessment, support was provided to review, adapt, and plan for the implementation of the national communication plan and to implement and monitor the departmental vaccine communication plan.
- Communication was targeted at the general population, priority groups (including health workers and opinion leaders), and the most vulnerable, representing 39,333 people.

- In 2021, the project partnered with Meta (Facebook's parent company) to run targeted ads on social media to overcome challenges related to misinformation about the virus and encourage vaccination.
- Support was provided to the Ministry of Health in the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination campaigns depending on the availability of vaccines and the coordination of partners. In the four departments, the percentage of people fully vaccinated (among the eligible population) between November 2021 and March 2022 increased as follows: Atacora: 3% to 53.37%; Plateau: 2% to 43.76%; Ouémé: 5% to 32.83% and Alibori: 3% to 31.91%. In addition, 3,632 people benefited from local communication activities for catch-up vaccination sessions in low-coverage areas of the four departments between May 30 and June 11, 2022.

Efforts by health workers, communities, and the Ministry of Health with support from the project are aimed at strengthening the resilience of the health system against COVID-19 and other future pandemics, as well as ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.



921,165

People fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in the four supported departments



1,018,960

People reached by USAID-supported mass media and social media messages about COVID-19 vaccines



601

Health workers and community health workers briefed on risk communication and community engagement

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The five-year Integrated Health Services Activity (IHSA) (2018-2023), funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), is implemented in four departments (Ouémé, Plateau, Atacora, and Alibori) in Benin. Its objective is to strengthen local expertise in delivering high-impact malaria, family planning (FP), maternal and child health (MCH), gender-based violence (GBV), and prevention and control of COVID-19 services with strong citizen engagement, to reduce maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent girls' mortality and morbidity. IHSA is implemented by Management Sciences for Health (MSH) in collaboration with four local and one international NGO partners.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Dr. Floride Niyuhire, Project Director
Email: fniyuhire@benin-ihsa.org

Dr. Alexis Bokossa, Senior Technical Advisor for COVID-19 control
Email: abokossa@benin-ihsa.org

USAID AGREEMENT OFFICER REPRESENTATIVE

Bertille Agueh Onambélé,
Health Program Management Specialist
Email: bonambele@usaid.gov

PROJECT PARTNERS

Management Sciences for Health
Dimagi, Inc.
L'Association pour l'Éducation, la Sexualité et la Santé en Afrique (APESSA)
Le Centre de Recherche en Reproduction Humaine et en Démographie (CERRHUD)

Le Centre de Réflexions et d'Actions pour le Développement Intégré et la Solidarité (CeRADIS)
L'Organisation pour le Développement Durable, le Renforcement et l'Auto promotion des Structures Communautaires (DEDRAS)