Greetings everyone!

Welcome to the new look of USAID/West Africa’s Regional Health Office quarterly ParlerHealth newsletter of activity updates, programmatic highlights, resources and announcements.

You may have noticed that the format of this issue looks different from our typical newsletter. We are currently experimenting with new formats of communications outreach. Please bear with us as we experiment and identify a new way to keep you in the loop.

This issue’s highlights include:

- Spotlight featuring Marie Ba - Director, Ouagadougou Partnership Coordination Unit
- Updates from our partners
- Resources
- Announcements

As always, I hope you find this newsletter interesting and relevant to your work. For any questions or comments regarding this and future newsletters, please contact Christiana Ayine (cayine@usaid.gov) and Alaa El-Bashir (aebashir@usaid.gov).

Regards,

Akua Kwateng-Addo
Regional Health Office Director
USAID/West Africa
What have been the biggest challenges for Ouagadougou Partnership countries during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Well, this health crisis has further strained and stretched Ministries of Health and disrupted operations at health centers and other places where women and families receive crucial reproductive health services. In addition, so much of the Partnership’s work is to increase coordination, collaboration, and information sharing, all of which are harder when people are working from home or without reliable internet. At the same time, we are encouraged by how country leaders, implementing partners, and donors have stepped up with additional efforts and resources to ensure we maintain our momentum and continue progress despite these challenges.

What are the most important lessons learned for you about building a successful partnership?
In short, be transparent and direct about what you are trying to accomplish and what you are not. Partnerships succeed and add value because different participants bring unique strengths, perspectives, and needs. But that also means partnerships must first identify common ground among potential participants – what do we stand to gain by working together? – and must also then agree how or whether different parties will reconcile different goals, priorities, and activities. In a similar vein, I’ve learned that you need to be sure to create room for all voices in discussions, and not allow the largest or loudest voices to dominate all discussions. Members must understand their viewpoints are needed and valued, and I’m constantly amazed by how many new ideas and innovations can come from honest and open discussion.

How does the partnership engage with youth and what are some opportunities you see?
We see countless opportunities for West African youth to play meaningful roles in determining their own reproductive futures. At the OP, we’ve devoted a huge amount of our efforts to identifying, helping train, and supporting youth leaders to advocate their needs to their governments and to multilateral agencies, and to participate and help lead design of services and programs. We’ve developed many mechanisms to do so, including creating and supporting youth associations in our countries, hiring youth as OP staff and including them in our boards, and sending youth to important events. We hope other organizations contribute to the future West Africa as well by including youth in their programming and their leadership not as figureheads or tokens, but as the most important constituency.

What drives you to be such a passionate advocate for West Africa and family planning?
Experience. I watch every day as women and families make decisions about their reproductive health without good information about their options. I see all around me wasted potential of brave African women and, for far too long, men and male-focused governments and communities make policies and laws about women’s livelihoods, well-being, education and bodily autonomy. But I’ve also seen the joy and fulfillment that comes when women and families are empowered to plan and control their reproductive lives, and the economic and other freedoms that in turn enable they and their families to live better lives.

Looking at the next 10 years of the OP, what is your deepest wish for the partnership?
To inspire a wide range of partnership and collaboration to advance women’s rights and to address our societies’ shortcomings. I believe our partnership can be a reference point and example of how to bring together capable, fierce and ambitious thought leaders, to move society forward, together.

Marie Ba holds a Bachelor’s degree in Social & Behavioral Sciences from the University of Maryland-College Park and a Master’s Degree in International Development and Peace / Conflict Resolution from the American University in Washington, D.C.
US Government Supports the Government of The Gambia to Improve Health Outcomes

Excerpts from the Press Release, US Embassy, Banjul, Gambia website

On Tuesday, May 18, 2021, representatives of the United States Government joined the Government of The Gambia at the national dissemination of the 2019-2020 Gambia Demographic Health Survey (DHS). Held at Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Center, the U.S. Ambassador to The Gambia, R Carl Paschall, accompanied by Dakar-based USAID Deputy Mission Director Dr. Zeric Smith, joined the Vice President of The Gambia, the Minister of Health, and The Gambia Bureau of Statistics to highlight the trends in health outcomes. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided both technical and financial support for the survey totaling $400,000.

Globally, the DHS Program, funded by USAID, has provided technical assistance to more than 400 surveys in over 90 countries. The breadth and depth of the information collected in DHS surveys is recognized as the gold standard for monitoring country progress in improving health outcomes. The United States Government, through USAID, will continue to support the DHS surveys in The Gambia. This support will include building the capacity of
the Bureau of Statistics in collecting and analyzing survey data. The United States Government supports activities in The Gambia which promotes stronger health systems for all.

Read more about the ceremony here.

The Role of Community Health Workers in Achieving Universal Health Coverage

Community Health Workers (CHWs) provide essential healthcare at a local level, but their status and funding are uneven, often sitting outside the official health system. Momentum is building and the case is being made to formalize and fund these essential health service providers as part of national and sub-national health systems throughout many low- and middle-resource countries.

At a high-level meeting in Lomé, Togo, in September 2019, health officials from nine West African Francophone countries joined regional representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO), the West Africa Health Organization (WAHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to review the status of CHWs in the region and make recommendations for formal health
system integration. Community health workers in Togo, who dispense contraceptives, malaria nets, and more, shared challenges faced as front-line health workers and made recommendations to strengthen the cadre's capacity and improve equitable access to health services. The Health Policy Plus project further developed a video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcv4FbS2zDw) to advocate for better conditions of service for CHWs.

Read more on Health Policy Plus program [here](#).

USAID Supports the Government of Guinea with an Equipped Regional Veterinary Laboratory

On May 26, 2021, the Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of the U.S. Embassy in Guinea, Steven Koutsis, and the Deputy Mission Director of USAID Guinea, Izetta Minko-Moreau, accompanied by government and local authorities, officially inaugurated the Regional Veterinary Laboratory of Kankan, fully renovated and equipped by USAID.

“The United States Government is honored to be a partner in Guinea’s success moving toward animal disease control,” said Chargé d’Affaires Koutsis. “It is encouraging to see how access to free diagnostic services will
improve, with every region of the country having one diagnostic laboratory with modern diagnostic technologies.”

With over $300,000 in funding provided by USAID, the renovation is the result of a 2015 strategic partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in support of the fight against emerging pandemic threats, through the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) program. The program has already funded the renovation of the Central Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory of Conakry and that of Labé and will soon hand over the N’Zérékoré Laboratory. With this renovation, the Kankan laboratory has now been upgraded to international standards. The GHSA program has provided advanced equipment reflecting the latest technology, and this has allowed the laboratory to successfully diagnose priority zoonoses in the country, including rabies, brucellosis, avian influenza, and anthrax.

Read more on the USAID/Guinea health program [here](#).

USAID Supports the Government of Ghana with training on COVID-19 Critical Case Management

On May 7, 2021 USAID/Ghana and the Ghana Health Service marked the end of the COVID-19 critical case management training at the Ghana Infectious Disease Center (GIDC) in Ga East, Greater Accra. The training started in January 2021 and involved four cohorts of clinicians, who participated in four week intensive training sessions. Clinicians learned and practiced mechanical ventilation, airway management, pulse oximetry, blood
pressure monitoring, and chest tube insertion. A total of 86 clinicians were trained on COVID-19 critical case management and oxygen therapy, using a combination of didactic methods and clinical rounds.

In late June 2021, USAID, through the implementing partner Jhpiego, supported Ghana’s COVID-19 national case management team to distribute 50 Zoll ventilators to regional facilities across 16 regions, along with a refresher clinical and non-clinical training on oxygen therapy for health staff. Planning is currently underway with the national case management team to cascade the GIDC training to district representatives. USAID continues to be a key partner in Ghana’s COVID-19 response, building on decades of support to improve the health of all Ghanaians.

Read more on USAID/Ghana’s health program here.

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USAID Donates IT Equipment to the Government of Guinea to Boost Ebola Response

Mrs. Kendra Schoenholz, Director of USAID Guinea, handing over desktops to Dr. Mamadou Saliou Bah, Director of the National Directorate of Laboratories

Ousmane Condé, USAID Guinea

USAID, through the Infectious Disease Detection and Surveillance activity, has provided desktops and tablets to the National Directorate of Laboratories of Guinea as part of the response to the Ebola outbreak. The equipment will provide critical support to improve the quality of laboratory services in Guinea.
At the official handover ceremony, the head of the National Directorate of Laboratories of Guinea, Dr. Mamadou Saliou Bah, thanked USAID for its upsurge of solidarity and determination to help Guinea keep up the fight against Ebola.

Read more about USAID/Guinea’s health program [here](#).

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**USAID/Mali Commemorates World Malaria Day**

Maimouna Traoré administering malaria prophylaxis to one of her children

*Photo Credit: Abdoulaye Goita*
USAID/Mali

With funding from the United States' President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), 7.5 million pregnant women and 9 million children throughout the world have had access to malaria prophylaxis drugs in 2020. Pregnant women and children also received bed nets during prenatal visits and school visits.

In Mali, 84% of pregnant women and 79% of children under five years old use an insecticide-treated bed net, making Mali the highest performing country of the 27 covered by PMI. Protecting against malaria assures a healthier future, a safer pregnancy for pregnant women and more school days for children.

Read more on USAID/Mali’s health program here.

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Women and Youth in Benin Organize Health Savings Funds to Access Malaria Treatment

While malaria can often be managed, treatment can be costly and not readily available in some areas of Benin, putting it out of reach for people like Louise Sambieni, who would normally be unable to afford the medicines. Fortunately, Louise is a member of Tilykna Women’s Group, which brings together women to start small businesses and divert a portion of profits to a common fund for health emergencies.

With the support of USAID's Integrated Health Services Activity, women like Louise are not just gaining new business skills, but are also coming together to develop a safety net for themselves. To learn more on how USAID/Benin is helping vulnerable youth and women overcome financial barriers and access to malaria treatment, read more on the story here.

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Behavioral Economics Approaches Inspire Innovative Complementary Feeding Options

A Niger NIT member sharing her feedback on the complementary feeding prototype she tested for her grandchild.

Photo Credit: Rabi Hassane Bako, Breakthrough ACTION Niger.

USAID Breakthrough ACTION’S Sahel RISE II Project

Breakthrough ACTION’s Sahel RISE II project in Burkina Faso and Niger builds capacity for social and behavior change (SBC) in health using tested and innovative approaches. The project created a National Innovations Team
(NIT) to generate new solutions to common health behaviors and to strengthen capacity to develop impactful interventions using behavioral economics insights.

The NIT explored the core concepts of ideation, prototyping and user testing that generated innovative and behaviorally informed solutions to complementary feeding challenges. NIT members said a behavioral economics approach allowed them to reflect on “how” and “why” complementary feeding is inadequate and to identify solutions to motivate caretakers to take action around insufficient feeding practices. Participants transformed ideas into “prototype” solutions. Prototypes included: a ceremony where fathers pledge to support complementary feeding and get a commitment sticker; a daily meal preparation container, accompanied by an infant bracelet to remind parents to practice complementary feeding; and a food planning kit with pre-packaged foods, measuring bowl, and reminders to simplify complementary feeding preparation.

Read more on Breakthrough ACTION's program [here](#).

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**Community Engagement for Improved Quality, Access, and Use of Family Planning Services**

![Leaders in Kantsché, Zinder meet to create a community action plan](image)

USAGID/West Africa Breakthrough ACTION

Community engagement is an interactive, dynamic process that brings the community and health providers together to identify barriers to service use and identify actions to overcome those barriers. To improve quality, access to, and use of family planning services, the West Africa Breakthrough ACTION (WABA) project in four
countries (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Togo) trains community leaders and district health officers to conduct community dialogues (CD) and site walk throughs (SWT).

As a first step, the leaders analyze the health data with the District Health Team and identify the most acute problems together with government officials, and health staff. They all discuss problems in the quality, access, and use of family planning services.

Generally, the process starts with a first meeting at the district level, where there is an orientation of the process, and a first discussion of the problems experienced by the population to use family planning. Once the problems are known, the stakeholders organize a community dialogue. During a community dialogue, the views of providers and service managers are shared as well as the views of the people. This creates a shared empathy on how good quality services are the result of collaboration between health providers and the population.

Read more on Breakthrough ACTION's program [here](#).

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RESOURCES:
Family Planning Impact Briefers from DC

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by Johns Hopkins CSSE. Click [here](#) to track cases by country/region and city/province.
- Track Africa’s progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. [More information here](#).
- International Conference on Family Planning, November 14 - 17, 2022. [More information here](#).

What’s Up Next:

- World Breastfeeding Week Aug. 1 - 7
- International Youth Day, Aug. 12
- World Contraception Day, Sept. 26
- Global Handwashing Day, Oct. 15
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