

FROM EBOLA TO COVID-19: COORDINATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

Sierra Leone Red Cross

Investing in disaster preparedness is worth it - both in terms of human lives saved and economic returns. In this story we learn how pre-established coordination mechanisms with local authorities enabled the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learning from past experiences

In 2014 Sierra Leone was struck by a deadly Ebola outbreak, taking the lives of thousands of people over the next few years. As a key partner to the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the Red Cross was on the frontlines of that epidemic response. The country has learned the immense value of having a robust multi-hazard national disaster management preparedness plan allowing all key partners to act quickly in the vital early stages of an outbreak. They have codified this into a document which establishes a framework for how government, the private sector, non-profits and the Sierra Leone Red Cross can collectively prepare for and respond to all-hazard emergencies. So, when Sierra Leone's first case of COVID-19 was identified in Freetown they were already planning about how to best prepare and respond.

Strengthening local capacities to effectively engage communities

Before the first case of COVID-19 was identified in the country the Red Cross had already been working alongside the government's National Coronavirus Emergency Centre by using its extensive network of volunteers to provide information to communities about COVID-19. Typically, the National Society would hold community meetings but due to the restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the virus they had to adapt. In the cities they conducted a radio and television campaign. In rural areas they had to use more innovative communications techniques. They used what they call a 'radio-in-the-box' system which involves identifying a strategic location in the community and setting up a loudspeaker to deliver messages, a method first pioneered during the Ebola outbreak. This allowed them to reach people they would not have been able to through other communications methods.

Red Cross branches located in two districts; Kambia, bordering Guinea and Kailahun bordering Guinea and Liberia involved in the [Community Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Programme \(CP3\)](#)¹ joined forces with local partners to mobilize chiefdoms to take quick action, screening visitors at points of entry, setting up handwashing stations in strategic public spaces, and engaging with communities about the risk of COVID-19 and prevention measures that could be taken to reduce the spread of the pandemic in the country. Red Cross volunteers reached out to trusted leaders, including traditional healers and teachers, and worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and local radio stations to share information, respond to questions and rumours about the pandemic.



SIERRA LEONE

PREPAREDNESS AREA & COMPONENT RELATED

COORDINATION



Coordination with Authorities

KEY STATS



18,283 household visits



Regular radio programmes with **36 community radio stations** in 9 districts and 2 major radio stations in the capital city.

¹ CP3 is supported by the IFRC with funding from the USAID Bureau for Global Health



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- When a National Society is part of the national disaster management preparedness plan before an epidemic or pandemic occurs, it allows for quicker mobilization and intervention as the specific services and expectations are clearly articulated and the Red Cross auxiliary role is recognized.
- Continuous strengthening of partnerships with government agencies provides a greater understanding of the role and capacity of the Sierra Leone Red Cross and increases the potential for collaboration on epidemic response efforts such as social mobilization, community-based surveillance, communications, and logistics.
- Ensuring that public health messaging provided to communities is clear and consistent, Red Cross collaborate with the Risk Communication pillar at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and other partners to design health messages for the consumption by the wider public and across all stakeholders to ensure that people know what they need to do to keep themselves and others safe.
- Using local resources, expertise, and people is key to enhance response times and provide more community-specific services.



"CP3 had a huge and significant impact on the COVID-19 response. The difference was great because CP3 was already there. We were already talking about disease outbreaks and how the community should be prepared to prevent them and protect themselves, so it was very easy to act in those communities".

*Nelson Nyandemoh, Director of Programs and Operations,
Sierra Leone Red Cross*

- For more information:
- Sierra Leone Red Cross Society: <http://sierraleoneredcross.org/>
 - National Society Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/disaster-preparedness
 - Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/epidemic-and-pandemic-preparedness

This success story was developed with support from:

