

COMMUNITY-BASED SURVEILLANCE FOR COVID-19

Somali Red Crescent Society – in Somaliland

Investing in disaster preparedness is worth it - both in terms of human lives saved and economic returns. In this story we learn how the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) pre-existing epidemic early warning system allowed for the early detection, and better response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

An early warning system

Often community members are the first to become aware of health concerns but are not able to quickly pass this information on to local health authorities. Community-Based Surveillance (CBS) empowers local volunteers to report on health risks of concern, allowing for quicker responses and to stop disease outbreaks before they become large-scale epidemics. Since 2018, SRCS with the support of the Norwegian Red Cross and Canadian Red Cross has been using CBS to detect signs and symptoms of potential infectious diseases with epidemic potential. So, having watched as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world, SRCS trained more than 800 volunteers in Somaliland to detect the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 in their communities.

Leveraging technology

During routine activities, volunteers provide health education and awareness on disease prevention and health promotion activities. These volunteers are known by their communities. When someone in the community is found to be sick showing signs and symptoms of a health risk of concern, volunteers use basic mobile phones to report the health risk through a simple SMS code to the CBS platform Nyss, a custom software designed by the Norwegian Red Cross in collaboration with Belgian Red Cross and the IFRC specifically for CBS. The Nyss platform sends a reply to the volunteer with health messaging they can use to engage with the individual or family who may be impacted. It also collects and analyses the data sent from all the reports submitted by CBS volunteers and triggers an alert to SRCS staff. After supervisors cross-check the alerts, Nyss can automatically send notifications to the health authorities who can then take further steps including case investigation, or other health responses as needed. Nyss allows for different human or animal health authorities (at various levels) to be identified and notified based on the health risk reported and their respective roles and responsibilities to ensure the right people are notified as quickly as possible about potential health risks.



The system in practice

In late March 2020, a CBS volunteer of SRCS was conducting house-to-house visits when she met a man who had recently travelled internationally and was exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. Following public health guidance, she remained at a safe distance, wore PPE, and used her mobile phone to report the health risk. Within two hours, a rapid response team from the Ministry of Health arrived at the individual's home, tested him for COVID-19 and advised him to quarantine. Within a few days it was confirmed that his test result was positive and hence the first official case of COVID-19 in Somaliland. SRCS volunteers trained in CBS continue their community health activities, including CBS, ensuring that the community is informed about the risks posed by COVID-19 and have reported further on suspected cases since this time. Since the start of including the health risk for COVID-19, 401 alerts were escalated for suspected cases in three CBS active regions of Somaliland.



PREPAREDNESS AREA & COMPONENT RELATED

OPERATIONAL CAPACITY



Early Action Mechanisms

KEY STATS



800 volunteers and 27 staff trained to detect the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 from May 2020 to April 2021

315 volunteers trained to send reports to the Nyss platform from May 2020 to April 2021



401 alerts escalated for suspected cases of COVID-19 since the start of including the health risk for COVID-19 in CBS activities

Keys to success



- When a National Society supports early detection systems such as CBS as part of their auxiliary role to the government, it can leverage local volunteers, facilitating the early response to potential disease outbreaks and stopping outbreaks where they start, in the community.
- Using simple and sustainable technology to aggregate information and analyse trends can help a National Society provide vital data to health authorities about public health concerns at community level.
- Ensuring that National Society volunteers are trained on the signs and symptoms of diseases of epidemic concern allows health authorities to better contain a disease outbreak at the start.
- National Society volunteers trained in CBS also provide more general health and hygiene promotion which can reduce the likelihood of diseases and other negative health impacts.



“When I found this case, I was a bit nervous, but immediately reported it to the CBS platform. Later I learned that I am the one who found and reported the first case of COVID-19 in Somaliland. So, I am so proud of myself and of being a volunteer with SRCS.”

Naima Aden Elmi, Volunteer, Somali Red Crescent Society

Additional resources:

- [CBS and Nyss in Somalia](#)
- [News \(cbsrc.org\)](#)

- [Infographic timeline of the first COVID-19 case in Somaliland](#)
- [Red Cross and Red Crescent Community-based surveillance knowledge hub](#)

- [Guidance for conducting CBS during COVID-19](#)
- [IFRC Twitter post](#)



For more information:

- Somali Red Crescent Society: <http://www.bishacas-srccs.org/>
- National Society Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/disaster-preparedness
- Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/epidemic-and-pandemic-preparedness

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