

# Pandemic Preparedness in the EAC Region

Supporting the East African Community in its advisory and coordinating role for the Partner States

## The challenge

The Secretariat of the East African Community is mandated to offer advisory and coordination support to its Partner States in combating communicable diseases. While East Africa was not affected by the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014/2016, the region frequently experiences outbreaks of the disease with fatalities as seen in the 2022 outbreak in Uganda. Rift Valley fever, Marburg fever, Dengue fever, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, Yellow fever viruses, to name a few, are endemic and pose a threat to public health.

The spread of infectious pathogens can compromise free movement and cross-border trade facilitated by the EAC's common market. The most dangerous infectious agents in the EAC region are harboured by wild and domestic animals and can spill over to the human population at any time. Global climate change also has a tangible impact on the ecosystems and has further increased epidemic and pandemic risks.

To prevent outbreaks of diseases that may affect public health, economic stability and the lives and livelihoods of the people, Partner States need to be prepared. This includes stark epidemiologic surveillance, detection and diagnosis capabilities. High levels of risk awareness among key stakeholders and continuous horizontal and vertical cooperation and information exchange are also important to meeting this objective.

## Our approach

Through the project "Support to Pandemic Preparedness in the EAC Region III", GIZ assists the EAC Secretariat to improve the regional crisis response capacity. It advises the Secretariat on the sustainable integration of 'One Health'.

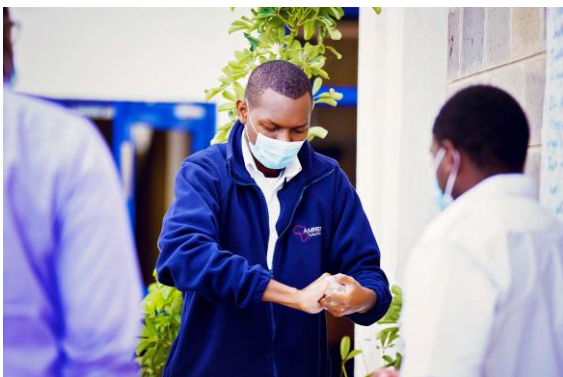
Project name	Support to Pandemic Preparedness in the EAC Region III
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	East African Community (EAC)
Lead executing agency	Secretariat of the East African Community
Duration	01.09.2022 – 31.08.2025

This approach involves disciplines and sectors that play an important role in preventing and responding to outbreaks of infectious diseases and other events of public health concern. The project offers technical expertise and builds capacity with the overall aim of improving the EAC's support for Partner States in pandemic preparedness. It is practice-oriented and pursues a participative strategy that involves stakeholders from the EAC Partner States. The project contributes to a uniform, effective, responsible and balanced approach to pandemic preparedness at regional and national government level.

The focus areas of Phase III of the project are: strengthening the technical capacities of the EAC Secretariat, Partner States and food safety agencies responsible for improving the microbial safety of food of animal origin; institutionalising risk and crisis communication at the EAC Secretariat and establishment of an EAC Regional Pool of Rapidly Deployable Experts.

## The benefits

When outbreaks of disease with epidemic potential are detected early on and measures are taken rapidly, everyone living in the EAC benefits. Poor rural populations are often hardest hit by the impacts of epidemics as they lack the knowledge and financial means to recognise health risks and protect themselves effectively. They often have limited access to health services and



*L. to r.: A trainer demonstrates proper handwashing technique; a scene from a regional simulation exercise held at Kilimanjaro International Airport.*

effective treatments and thus benefit particularly from the project's measures to support the EAC Secretariat, especially improved risk communication.

## Success factors

The project aims to mainstream pandemic preparedness, implement the 'One Health' approach and risk and crisis communication through regional structures, and to develop capacities at regional level. It supports implementation of existing strategies and development of new ones, strengthens networks and complements them with flanking measures.

Capacity development measures at regional level and in selected institutions in the Partner States are designed to ensure that the skills acquired promote the countries' systems and cross-border cooperation in the long term. The regional approach aims to create structures and capacities relevant to all EAC Partner States.

## Achievements of previous project phases

- East African experts who supported the fight against Ebola between 2014 and 2016 met at a supra-regional conference in Nairobi organised by the project to share their experiences. They formulated valuable lessons learned and recommendations that have since influenced political strategy papers and decision-making at national and regional level. Their recommendations have been published and widely disseminated.
- The project reviewed the regional response to a bird flu outbreak in Uganda in 2018 and developed lessons learned to be better prepared for future outbreaks.
- Simulation exercises held have enabled the Secretariat and the Partner States to assess their pandemic preparedness status. The outcomes are being used to facilitate practical corrective actions to protect people in the EAC region and beyond.
- The project led the development of a regional risk and crisis communication strategy which provides a framework for

collaboration between the regional and national levels and guides on the timely provision of information so that EAC residents can take the appropriate measures to protect themselves.

- The EAC Technical Working Group on communicable and non-communicable diseases has been expanded to include not only health professionals. This enables a broader, multisectoral approach to the management of disease outbreaks and other events of public health concern in the region.
- Implementation of the WASH approach with sensitisation of more than six million people and the establishment of handwashing facilities in areas that have a high risk for infection transmission will reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- The project has developed a generic postgraduate 'One Health' curriculum on pandemic preparedness. It will be open to a broad variety of professional disciplines relevant to the prevention of and response to infectious disease outbreaks and to graduates from all EAC Partner States.

## An example from the field

A simulation exercise is a great means to analyse the capacities at hand in order to improve preparedness and strengthen response to health and other emergencies. In May 2022, together with the World Health Organisation, the project supported the EAC Secretariat in organising a simulation exercise focused on reinforcing disease surveillance at points of entry. Participants included over 60 emergency management experts from Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. "The exercise has proved to be very significant in identifying the strengths, weaknesses, but also the opportunities within our systems," noted Dr Matur Alembany, Director, Vector and Disease Control from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock in South Sudan. Dr Matur was one of the participants who were trained as trainers during this exercise. "We are now planning to conduct a similar exercise at the Juba International Airport and Nimule One Stop Border Post."

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