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CONTINUITY OF CGP-GHS ACTIVITIES IN ETHIOPIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: MARCH-JUNE 2020

August 2020

The CORE Group Polio – Global Health Security Project (CGP-GHS) in Ethiopia functions in 85 woredas in rural, pastoralist and semi-pastoralist areas to facilitate vaccination, community-based surveillance and reporting of Acute Flaccid Paralysis for polio, measles and neonatal tetanus. In 2019, the project broadened its disease portfolio to include three priority zoonotic diseases – Rabies, Anthrax, and Brucellosis.

The CGPP began operations in Ethiopia in 2001 with project activities implemented through five international and four local partners. Ethiopia's network of community volunteers conducts community-based surveillance (CBS), engages families in discussions about the importance of health and immunization, provides behavior change education on key health issues, clarifies rumors and misperceptions, and links families to vaccination and other health services.

PROJECT ADAPTS TO COVID-19 REALITIES

Ethiopia reported its first COVID-19 case on March 13, 2020; just two days after WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the project was actively conducting CBS trainings for vaccine-preventable and priority zoonotic diseases. In March, the project completed training on community-based surveillance in 34 woredas (i.e., districts) successfully reaching a total of 1,825 Community Health Volunteers (CVs) and Community Animal Health Workers (CAWs), 955 Health Extension Workers (HEWs) and 426 Animal Health Technicians. (As of July 30, a total of 3,117 CVs/CAWs, 2,602 HEWs, and 1,115 Animal Health Assistants have been fully trained on GHS CBS.)

The CGPP Secretariat Director is a member of the COVID-19 emergency response operation which serves as the command center and contributes to the National Surveillance and Contact Tracing Working Group. As COVID-19 cases crept up to about 200 in May, a shortage of face-coverings and masks resulted in the interruption of many activities. Community engagement slowed until partners could pull together adequate quantities of face-coverings and hand sanitizer to ensure staff and volunteer safety. Today, under the current emergency situation, activities are adapted and aligned with physical distancing and face-covering guidance on face-to-face meetings, group gatherings, and household-level activities. CGP-GHS leadership remains committed to the personal health and safety of its vast network.

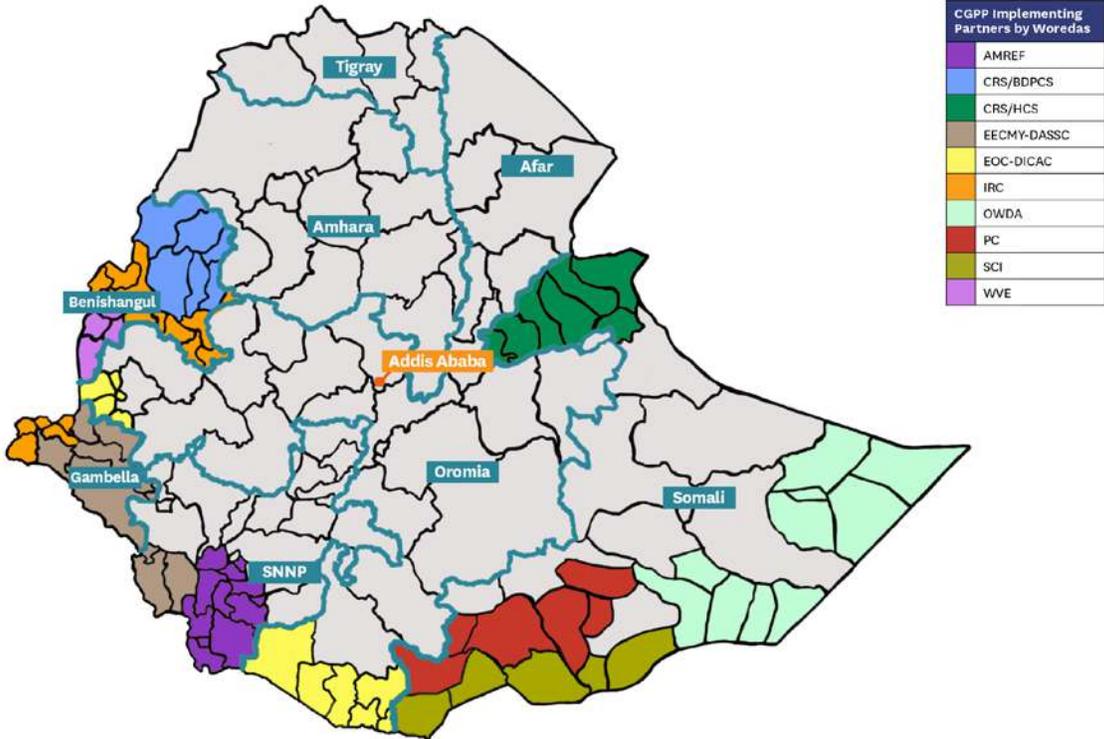


GHS ACTIVITIES CONTINUE WITH COVID-19 PROTOCOL IN PLACE

Even as activities slowed from March through June, the CBS effort continued. For example, there were 14 rabies alerts in animals, 3 rabies alerts in humans, 1 Anthrax alert, 7 Brucellosis alerts, and 2 die-offs reported. The animals affected included camels, dogs, donkeys, sheep, goats, ox, and cattle.

In June, in the Gambella region, an Anthrax alert involved 27 animal alerts from Lare woreda. The cases were reported by CVs and CAWs to the woreda Livestock and Fisheries Resources Development office (LFRD) and the woreda health office. All cases were oxen and cows from one kebele (Keachnypuot) of the woreda. Then the woreda LFRD office reported the issue to the regional LFRD Bureau for action. Due to the collaborative nature of the partnership between the region and woreda, the response was immediate, targeted and effective: partners vaccinated all oxen and cows in all 28 kebeles of the woreda.

ETHIOPIA



The project has integrated COVID-19 sensitization into its risk communication and training packets, at no additional cost. This enabled CGP-GHS to be responsive to government while also operating within the scope of its budget and agreement parameters. CGP-GHS CVs and CAWs conducted house-to-house education and community meetings on an array of topics: COVID-19 awareness, polio, measles, neonatal tetanus immunization and priority zoonotic diseases. From April through June, Community Volunteers visited 280,382 households and reached more than 729,416 individuals with health education.



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With mounting numbers of COVID-19 cases, the CGP-GHS continues to press ahead, producing risk communication posters for Anthrax, Brucellosis and Rabies and conducting community-based surveillance training in Kamash Zone for Yaso and Kamash woredas. The CGP-GHS continues to participate in the National One Health steering committee meetings, the sub-committee meetings on One Health communications, and is a technical reviewer on disease-specific outbreak response and action plans. CGP-GHS participated in the After Action Review of the camel die-off in Somali region where the team shared the surveillance and reporting process, and reported out on challenges faced during that process.

CGP-GHS continues to serve a critical role in supporting USAID's GHSA portfolio in Ethiopia. There is no other partner with the reach and the trust across such a vast and diverse country. As the acute response to the COVID-19 pandemic stabilizes and safety measures become more accessible, CBS trainings will be completed, risk communication on priority zoonotic diseases will get underway, and the impact of COVID-19 on the continuity of GHSA activities will be minimized.