

Cross-border Field Simulation Exercise at the Namanga Border, 11-14 June 2019

Frequently Asked Questions

(as of 21 May 2019)

What is a Field Simulation Exercise?

A Field Simulation Exercise, in short FSX, is an interactive technique of evaluating risk preparedness. It simulates a situation under real conditions which could occur at any time. Examples would be a natural disaster, a response to a road accident or an outbreak of an infectious disease. An FSX tests the status of preparedness and capability of an organization or other entity to respond to a simulated situation. It allows participants and operational staff to identify strengths and gaps in capacities and can facilitate practical corrective actions at all levels (national, regional, community and global). A FSX familiarizes the participants with their roles and responsibilities. It aims to build and enhance the necessary capacities to minimize the risk of an incident becoming a crisis, and in the event of an emergency, improve the ability of teams to correctly assess and respond.

What is the purpose of the planned cross-border Field Simulation Exercise?

The Field Simulation Exercise planned for Namanga aims to enhance the status of preparedness for, and response to infectious disease outbreaks in the EAC region with a focus on Kenya and Tanzania. In the last two years, the EAC Partner States experienced cases of Ebola, Rift Valley, Marburg and Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic fevers, Cholera, Polio and Plague among others, and the current Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has so far caused over 1,600 human infections and more than 1,000 people have died. The disease stands at the threshold to the EAC and presents a major challenge to the health and socio-economic wellbeing of the people of East Africa. The pathogens that cause these diseases occur naturally in the region and can put the lives and livelihoods of the people in the EAC at risk at any time. Therefore, the region needs to be prepared. The planned cross-border Field Simulation Exercise aims to strengthen the capacities of all people involved in preventing and responding to infectious disease outbreaks across different sectors of society, thereby making the life safer for all citizens.

Why does the EAC Secretariat convene the Field Simulation Exercise?

The East African Community (EAC) Secretariat has a coordinating and advisory role for the EAC Partner States in preparedness for and response to infectious disease outbreaks that jeopardise public health. As long as an outbreak is restricted to one Partner State, response and mitigation measures are the responsibility of this country. Once a disease has crossed the borders and spreads to another Partner State or occurred simultaneously in more than one of these countries, the EAC Secretariat comes in. Just like staff from the EAC Partner States, Secretariat staff needs to continuously train and test their ability, knowledge and roles. Regular field simulation exercises are also required by the regional contingency plan, which is the policy framework for the prevention and control of disease outbreaks in the region. The EAC Secretariat is serious about its responsibility and therefore convenes the Field Simulation Exercise at Namanga. It is supported by the "Support to Pandemic

Preparedness in the EAC Region” project that is implemented by GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH) on behalf of the German Government. The World Health Organization (WHO) leads the exercise in line with its mandate of implementing the International Health Regulations globally.

Why does the Field Simulation Exercise take place at Namanga?

The decision to convene the FSX at Namanga traces back to the year 2015, when the EAC Sectoral Council of Ministers of Health, the highest ranking health decision-making body in the region, directed the EAC Secretariat to conduct a cross-border simulation exercise at the border between the Republic of Kenya and The United Republic of Tanzania. The planned FSX puts this decision into practice.

Who is participating?

About 250 people will participate in the FSX, the majority from the two actively involved Partner States Kenya and Tanzania. However, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda will also have representatives on site. In addition, a number of regional and international institutions and organisations will participate and observe the exercise. Active participants stem from local, district, regional and national levels and from the EAC Secretariat. They have different professional backgrounds and represent various sectors of society, such as human health, animal and environmental health, agriculture, trade, tourism, meteorology, military and police, media and civil society. This mixture reflects the “One Health” approach that is being applied in the pandemic preparedness and response in the region.

What is the “One Health” approach?

Between 60 and 70 % of infectious diseases are transmitted between animals and humans through direct contact, via food or vectors and many are influenced by climate. These diseases are called “zoonosis”. The “One Health” approach recognizes and addresses this fact. It is a multi-sector and multi-disciplinary approach in the prevention and response to infectious disease outbreaks. It involves those professions and sectors which are affected by an outbreak or can contribute to preventing it or mitigating its impact.

For example, beginning of 2018 the so far largest outbreak of Bird Flu in the country occurred in the Republic of Uganda. This did not only affect fishing communities and poultry farmers in the region, it also caused a trade ban for poultry that lasted almost one year and caused considerable economic losses. Other outbreaks affected human health and the tourism industry as one of the biggest sources of income in the region.

Why are the military, civil society and the media part of the exercise?

By including the military, the public and the media in preparedness and response measures, the FSX follows recommendations based on the practical experience of some 500 East African experts who fought the Ebola epidemic that occurred between 2014 and 2016 in West Africa. More than 30.000 people were infected and more than 10,000 died during this outbreak. One of their lessons learned was that the military should be included from the beginning in any outbreak scenario, as it is a mandated agency in a disaster and plays a crucial role. However, the military has its own rules and operating procedures that must be understood by civilian participants and vice versa to achieve the best possible results.

Another lesson learned was that it is crucial to communicate the risk related to a disease outbreak and the most effective ways of personal protection in a manner that is adapted to

the culture of the people in the affected region. The EAC Secretariat involves the media and society representatives such as community and religious leaders in risk and crisis communication to reach out to the people on the ground with “One Voice” and in their individual language and culture.

What is the nature of the outbreak chosen for this exercise?

For this exercise, the EAC Secretariat and Partner States in collaboration with GIZ and WHO selected a pathogen and an outbreak scenario that is relevant to the region and has the potential to threaten the lives and livelihoods of the people in the EAC. **The chosen pathogen is a “fictitious” one, meaning that it does not occur in nature with these features.** It will have an impact on animal and human health, agriculture, trade and tourism and be affected by climate (change) in order to allow testing of the “One Health” approach. However, as mentioned above both, **the ability of the pathogen to cause harm and the nature of the outbreak itself are fictitious and do not occur naturally in this form.**

What will be tested?

Both, the EAC Secretariat and Partner States will test their contingency plans and related Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in this exercise. The Secretariat will also test its Regional Risk and Crisis Communication Strategy and the SOPs that were developed to put it into practice. SOPs have the character of a checklist and provide a red thread for the implementer so that he/she does not forget to consider important steps.

Which sites will participate in the Field Simulation Exercise?

The main exercise region is the border at Namanga between Kenya and Tanzania. However, participants will work from their normal work places: The experts from the national and the regional level from Dar Es Salaam, Dodoma, Arusha and Nairobi; the ones from the district level from Longido and Kajiado. The two international airports (Jomo Kenyatta and Kilimanjaro International Airport) will also participate in the exercise. However, they will only test a small, defined role in outbreak preparedness and response that does not disturb the airport routine and will go largely unnoticed by travellers. Furthermore, the region will test the ability of mobile laboratories under the German Development Bank financed “EAC Network of Public Health Reference Laboratories for Communicable Diseases” project to react quickly to an outbreak. At Namanga, the One Stop Border Post (OSBP) features prominently. The EAC Secretariat will conduct its emergency operations from here. The Opening Ceremony and the Press Briefing will also take place at the OSBP on 11th June 2019. In addition, two farms on either side of the border will participate in the exercise as well as one health facility/dispensary and slaughter house on the Tanzanian and Kenyan side.

What are the exact dates of the FSX?

Preparations for the Field Simulation Exercise are already underway and will be in full swing from 8th June 2019 onwards. The Opening Ceremony and the start of the exercise are scheduled for 11th June. The two following days will be full exercise days at the various sites. 14th June is reserved for evaluating the exercise, identifying challenges and gaps and recommending the necessary action. The simulation will end with the adoption of the official EAC report by the EAC Partner States.

Will the FSX affect traffic at the One Stop Border Post or the routine at any other exercise site?

The Exercise is planned and organised in a way that traffic at the OSPB and other simulation sites will be affected minimally. All sites will be well marked and passengers will be informed about the exercise. This is important, as uninformed passers-by might suspect that something serious is going on when they see the military, ambulances and people in protective gear. The police will also assist in facilitating smooth procedures. However, more than 200 participants crossing back and forth between Kenya and Tanzania during these four days will not go unnoticed. This is why the EAC Secretariat appreciates it if the media and the people on the ground spread this information about the FSX widely by word of mouth and contribute to making this exercise a success for a safer future for the people in the region.

What comes after the FSX?

The EAC Secretariat will inform the public about the outcome of the exercise and recommendations derived from the evaluation will be submitted to the Sectoral Council of Ministers of Health for further consideration and policy guidance. Lessons learned will make the experience that was gained during this exercise accessible to a broad range of stakeholders including the other regional economic communities in Africa and beyond.