

# 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 (EAC) is mandated to offer advisory and coordinating assistance for the EAC Partner States Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda in combating infectious diseases. While East Africa was not affected by the latest Ebola epidemic, it too frequently experiences outbreaks of the disease with fatalities. The Dengue fever, anthrax and Marburg virus pathogens are widespread and can jeopardise public health at any time. The spread of infectious pathogens is promoted by migration and transboundary trade, which is facilitated by the EAC common market, and by the impacts of climate change.

The Ebola epidemic revealed major flaws that accelerated the rapid spread of the disease. Two of them are the lack of rapid, clear and efficient communication tailored to the population with its specific cultural and social backgrounds, and also the lack of close cooperation between various disciplines. The latter is especially important, as around two thirds of infectious diseases with epidemic potential are zoonoses, which can be transmitted between animals and humans. To this end, regional strategies and skills that are lacking in the EAC are required.

### Our Approach

Against this backdrop, GIZ assists the EAC Secretariat and its Health Department in improving its regional crisis response capacity. It contributes to putting the East African Community Regional Contingency Plan into practice and to developing and implementing a regional risk and crisis communication strategy.

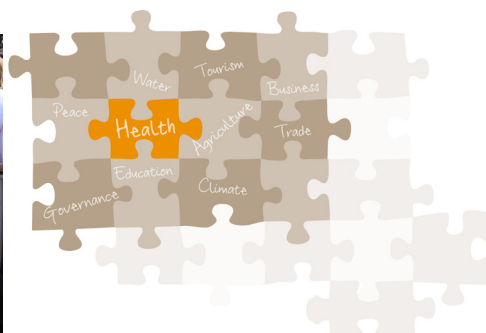
It advises the Secretariat on the integration of the One Health approach that brings together different disciplines such as medical doctors and veterinarians, climate, environmental and agricultural experts and representatives from commerce and tourism in cross-sectoral, integrative epidemic management. The

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project offers technical expertise and builds capacity with the overall aim of improving the EAC's support for the Partner States in pandemic preparedness. It is practice-oriented and pursues a participative strategy that involves stakeholders from the EAC Partner States and contributes to a uniform, effective, responsible and balanced approach in pandemic preparedness at regional and national government level.

In tangible terms, the project

- Facilitates collaboration between various sectors in the sense of One Health;
- Assists in the development of a One Health curriculum and in its inclusion in syllabi;
- Supports the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and tests them under real-life conditions in simulation exercises;
- Promotes cross-border activities and harmonisation of national plans and capacities with regional strategies;
- Facilitates the South-South exchange of experiences in pandemic prevention and control, and the development of best practices and lessons learned;
- Assists in establishing and using early warning systems.



From left to right:

Vaccination of dogs is the most effective and efficient means of protecting humans from rabies infections (Photo: GIZ/Philbert Rweyemamu)

Health is a cross-cutting issue (Photo: GIZ)

The project contributes to the EAC-German programme 'Providing support for the integration process to improve the health of the population in the East African Community (EAC)' and cooperates closely with related projects and programmes implemented by KfW Development Bank. The project also collaborates with German Federal Institutes, with GIZ's Epidemic Preparedness Team and with the 'Africa Regional - ESTHER Alliance: University and Hospital Partnerships in the Health Systems Strengthening Sector'.

## The Benefits

When disease outbreaks with epidemic potential are detected early on and measures are taken more rapidly, everyone living in the EAC Partner States benefits. Often, the poor rural population is hardest hit by the impacts of epidemics, since they lack the knowledge and financial means to identify health risks and protect themselves effectively. They also often have only limited access to health services and effective treatments, and thus benefit particularly strongly from the support measures for the EAC Secretariat, especially from improved risk and crisis communication.

## Success factors

The project aims to mainstream pandemic preparedness, implementation of the One Health approach and risk and crisis communication in regional structures, as well as to develop capacities at regional level. It supports existing strategies, strengthens networks and complements them with accompanying measures. Capacity development measures at the regional level and in selected institutions in the Partner States are designed to ensure that the acquired skills promote the countries' systems and cross-border cooperation in the long term. The regional approach aims to create structures and capacities relevant for all EAC Partner States.

## An example from the field

Rabies is an infectious virus disease of global public health concern. It is the most fatal disease transmitted between animals and humans. Once a person shows signs of infection, there is no cure. According to international scientific estimates, in Tanzania alone, some 1,500 people are infected every year, most of them children and mainly due to dog bites. The World Health Organization (WHO) regards the vaccination of dogs as the most effective intervention against rabies. 'This strategy has a direct impact on public health by reducing the transmission of rabies to humans,' said Fahari Marwa, Head of the Agriculture



and Food Security Department in the EAC Secretariat, when speaking during a GIZ-supported awareness raising campaign on World Rabies Day in September 2017 in schools in Arusha. The campaign reached some 45,000 pupils and more than 1,500 dogs were vaccinated free of charge.

Marwa raised his concern about the poor data situation regarding rabies in the EAC Partner States, and called for closer cooperation between human and veterinary medical professions in the EAC region in surveillance, diagnostics, prevention and treatment of infectious diseases in the full sense of the One Health approach. The EAC Secretariat intends to support the 2018 World Rabies Day in all Partner States to further emphasise the regional significance of the issue.

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