

COV-FAB PROJECT OVERVIEW

COVID-19 Response and Health Emergency Preparedness

PROMOTING COVID-19 VACCINE EQUITY

From April 2022 to March 2024, longstanding partners IMA World Health and the Africa Christian Health Associations Platform (ACHAP) are implementing the **Promotion of COVID-19 Vaccine Equity through Faith-Based Networks in Africa (CoV-FaB) project** with the support of The Osprey Foundation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The project responds to the significant lag in vaccination rates within East, West, Central, and Southern African countries. After initial delays in vaccine arrival, human resource constraints and other bottlenecks in public health infrastructure slowed deployment, particularly in rural areas, which gave disinformation/misinformation more time to become entrenched. The CoV-FaB project is addressing these inequities and building vaccine confidence by contributing to national COVID-19 response strategies through additional resources and targeted approaches to reach the most underserved populations. This work leverages the important role of faith-based networks, leaders, health workers, and infrastructure.

CoV-FaB is supporting ACHAP member Christian Health Associations (CHAs) in coordinating with the Ministries of Health in their respective countries to build vaccine confidence, accelerate outreach, and administer vaccinations in low-coverage communities. The work is primarily focused on Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe but supports CHAs in six other countries (Ivory Coast, Liberia, Central Africa Republic, Tanzania, Zambia, Madagascar) through a small-grants process.

INCREASING VACCINE UPTAKE

CoV-FaB's baseline surveys (2022) in Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe identified the primary drivers of vaccine hesitancy and specific approaches and communications likely to address concerns in each country. For example, the survey found that the speed of vaccine development was a major impediment, leading to speculation it was ineffective or fears of serious side effects, such as infertility or death. Program strategies in response to these findings, as well as the

continually evolving challenges and opportunities in each country, are developed by CHAs with ongoing management and technical support from ACHAP and IMA World Health. Such strategies include:

- **deploying mobile vaccination teams;**
- **strengthening health care worker capacity** through trainings; and
- **combating misinformation** to create vaccine demand.

The project is closing gaps in "last mile" service delivery by micro-planning alongside the local ministry of health officials, engaging faith leaders as "champions" for vaccine uptake, and developing evidence-based media and communications strategies to address misinformation with technical support from project partner, Internews. The "shots-in-arms" resulting from CHA engagement are contributing to national targets for achieving full vaccination among their populations (70% in both countries, as per WHO recommendations) and both public and faith-based health systems are being strengthened for future health emergency responses.

CoV-FaB builds on IMA's work with ACHAP initiated in the earliest days of the pandemic that accompanied CHAs through the rapidly evolving health emergency and ensured access to up-to-date operational guidance, technical assistance, and tools for localized responses in coordination with national ministries of health.

HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

As the COVID-19 pandemic burden evolves and national ministries of health move to integrate COVID-19 specific vaccinations into routine health services, IMA World Health and ACHAP are working through the project to assess more general health emergency preparedness needs. For example, at the country level, the project helped the Sierra Leone CHA (CHASL) to position for participation in the Ministry of Health's technical working group that is developing health emergency plans for Sierra Leone, informed by CHASL's experience with



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Ebola as well as COVID in the country's under-served settings.

The project is also strengthening ACHAP's collaboration with a sister organization, the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN), which led to EPN developing a health care worker (HCW) training curriculum on health emergency preparedness that is being offered to participating CHAs in CoV-FaB and streamlined through EPN's online learning platform.

Emergency preparedness planning will also address needs and gaps in vital supply chains to position faith-based health networks as critical players in preparing for future health emergencies, with an end goal to realize coordinated, rapid response and standardized care where infectious disease outbreaks occur.

EXTENDING PREPAREDNESS THROUGH REGIONAL FAITH NETWORKS

IMA World Health and ACHAP will continue engagement in the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN), a Christian non-profit organization comprising 136 faith-based organizations, including CHAs. More than 300 million people rely on health care provided by EPN members – pharmacists, health care providers and supply chain professionals - of which IMA World Health is a supporting member. IMA World Health's *Smart Leveraged Church Supply Chain Strengthening* project is helping to ensure preparedness through a new tool to help member organizations assess capacity and plan actions to meet minimum standards.

LONG-TERM PARTNERS

ACHAP is an umbrella organization comprised of 43 national-level faith-based health networks known as Christian Health Associations (CHAs) in 34 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. IMA World Health supported ACHAP's founding in 2007 to ensure sustained and coordinated support to country-level CHAs that enables them to work effectively alongside their ministries of health as private sector partners and sustain high-quality care, particularly for under-served rural communities. CHAs' faith-driven public health programs include hospitals, clinics, drug supply organizations, dispensaries, training institutions, and community outreach services that are among the longest-standing service providers



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focused on under-served populations in their respective countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, CHAs provide an estimated 30-70% of health care in their various countries.

For instance, the Zimbabwe Association of Church-Related Hospitals (ZACH), founded in 1974, includes over 250 hospitals, clinics, and other facilities which provide 68% of the health care in rural Zimbabwe and 45% nationally. Through CoV-FaB, ZACH is collaborating with the Ministry of Health to increase vaccine access in under-served areas through outreach and services and to increase demand by tackling misinformation and empowering faith leaders as change agents.

IMA World Health and ACHAP have partnered continuously to strengthen opportunities for learning, collaboration and visibility, which ACHAP, as the umbrella network, provides to CHAs. For instance, IMA World Health has provided strategic and financial support to ACHAP for biennial conferences, including ACHAP's 10th Biennial Conference in 2022, which attracted a variety of public and private sector stakeholders in the global health space in Africa to share learning from the COVID-19 pandemic. IMA World Health is also strengthening ACHAP's and CHAs' capacity in DHIS2 and conducting organizational capacity assessments (OCAs) to identify priority needs.



The Corus Effect

Founded in 1960, IMA World Health is a leading public health organization that delivers solutions to health-related problems across the developing world. We work with local partners and governments to strengthen existing health systems, prevent and treat diseases, improve maternal and child health, promote nutrition and WASH, respond to sexual and gender-based violence, and contribute to global health security.

IMA World Health leads global health programming at Corus International, a humanitarian organization that unites an array of world-class nonprofits and businesses, each with specialized expertise. Our reach and capabilities are amplified by the other global leaders in our Corus International family. In 2021, Corus organizations carried out more than 100 projects across 41 countries throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East.