

# Pandemic Prevention in the ECOWAS Region

Strengthening ECOWAS, the West African Health Organisation (WAHO), the Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control (RCSDC), the Regional Animal Health Centre (RAHC), and the Directorate of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for a One Health oriented prevention and control system

## The challenge

Continuous outbreaks of infectious diseases transmitted from animals to humans (zoonoses) and environmental threats to health characterise the epidemiological context in West Africa and pose a substantial burden to its population. Risks and hazards can be effectively minimised if various actors responsible for animal, environmental and human health work together in a coordinated manner. This approach is called "One Health". The One Health approach has been introduced and is currently being implemented in the ECOWAS region but is not optimally established yet. This jeopardises the efficient prevention and control of epidemic outbreaks not only in individual countries but also in the entire region, exposing the population to severe health threats.

## Our approach

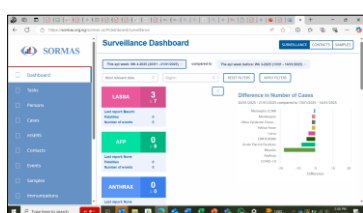
The third phase of the project "Support to Pandemic Prevention in the ECOWAS Region" (RPPP) builds on the work of its two predecessor projects, which were implemented from 2016 to 2024. It is funded by BMZ and works with ECOWAS institutions and agencies to reinforce the regional networks for pandemic preparedness and response. The projects works in three main areas: strengthening the digital surveillance and outbreak management system in the ECOWAS region, with a focus on Nigeria and Ghana; working with RCSDC, RAHC and DENR on improving the regional One Health coordination mechanism; and creating better conditions for ECOWAS Member States to actively engage in gender-sensitive pandemic prevention, preparedness, and

response efforts, including efficient risk communication measures and institutionalising human resource strengthening through leadership courses.

Project name	The Regional Programme Support to Pandemic Prevention in the ECOWAS Region
Commissioned by	The German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	ECOWAS Region
Lead executing agency	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Implementing partners	ECOWAS, RCSDC, WAHO, RAHC, DENR
Financial volume	5 Million Euro
Duration	01/2025 – 12/2026

In the first area, supporting SORMAS implementation and sustainability, the project focuses on enabling public health institutes (PHIs) in Ghana and Nigeria to take full ownership of the software. This includes capacity-building efforts to ensure staff can maintain and update the system independently. Training programs for the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the Ghana Health Service (GHS) enhance technical skills and use of data for decision making. A comprehensive SORMAS toolkit anchors sustainability at the national level. Additionally, the project supports RCSDC in setting up a regional digital surveillance platform, facilitating data sharing between systems to strengthen outbreak management.

In the second area, advancing the One Health approach, the project emphasizes operationalizing the ECOWAS regional One Health coordination mechanism through annual One



L. to r.: HPAI workshop / SORMAS platform / Risk Communication Strategy validation

Health operational activity plans, while communication materials for the One Health Secretariat enhance engagement. Regular meetings and workshops ensure the One Health coordination mechanisms remain fully functional, with the yearly regional One Health conference being key, bringing together all stakeholders from the One Health sectors to discuss relevant topics, plan activities, and hold high-level discussions.

In the third area, fostering regional and national exchanges on One Health, the project creates better conditions for ECOWAS Member States to engage in gender-sensitive pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response. Communities of Practice (CoPs) facilitate the exchange of lessons learned and recommendations. Clearly defined concept notes optimize these CoPs, strengthening engagement across the Member States. Leadership courses for key stakeholders from the One Health sectors build capacity for implementing gender-sensitive measures in pandemic preparedness and response.

## The impact

Significant progress has been made in advancing One Health-oriented pandemic preparedness and response within the ECOWAS region during previous project phases. A robust regional network has been reinforced, bolstering collaborative efforts across borders. The ECOWAS One Health Leadership Course has empowered over 100 leaders, equipping them to tackle complex regional and national challenges. The Regional ECOWAS One Health Strategy & Governance Manual provides a strategic framework for future endeavors. Institutional and technical capacities have been fortified within key organizations such as WAHO, RCSDC, and RAHC. Technological advancements in digital surveillance and outbreak management have been prioritized, with SORMAS established in Nigeria (across several levels) and Ghana and groundwork laid for a regional epidemiological system based on the SORMAS technology. Risk communication efforts rooted in the One Health principles have been strengthened. Additionally, a gender- and human-rights-based approach has been integrated into policy frameworks, ensuring inclusivity and equity in decision-making processes. These achievements now serve as a strong foundation for the new project phase, enabling continued progress and innovation in strengthening the region's resilience against public health threats.

## Success factors

The establishment of robust networks, engaging both regional and national institutions, has strengthened collaboration and resilience. For instance the creation of the Risk Communications network exemplifies successful synergies through regional partnerships backed by national commitments. In the new phase, these successes will be leveraged to broaden regional partnerships, optimize resources, and ensure the sustainable implementation of strategies. Building on the successes of previous phases, formal ECOWAS structures such as WAHO, RCSDC, RAHC, and DENR will be central to fostering ownership and sustainability. Strengthening these institutions will ensure that pandemic prevention strategies are embedded within national systems, driving long-term commitment and resilience. Gender-specific considerations in pandemic prevention will underpin all strategies. One Health mechanisms will be further integrated to promote a comprehensive approach to disease prevention, while the expansion of SORMAS will enhance surveillance capabilities and interoperability for rapid response to emerging outbreaks.

## Future outlook: Sustainable approaches to interventions

A regional workshop organized by ECOWAS on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) brought together experts and stakeholders from across West Africa to enhance preparedness and response. This event played a crucial role in strengthening regional coordination and improving the region's capacity to detect and respond to HPAI outbreaks. It showcased how the One Health coordination mechanism can be operationalized by integrating human, animal, and environmental health sectors into a coordinated response.

The workshop was a practical example of how stakeholders can come together to share knowledge and collaborate on common challenges. By fostering discussions on best practices and frameworks for disease control, it emphasized the importance of early detection, rapid response, and robust surveillance systems. This approach demonstrates how one of the objectives of the new project on establishing and strengthening CoPs — such as a Community on Risk Communications — can improve collaboration and lead to more effective and sustainable outbreak surveillance and response.

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