

Sanitation and hygiene training materials and job aids from the National Community Health Assistant Program curriculum are now also a key feature of the COVID-19 training package for community and frontline health workers in Liberia.

# Quarterly Report

## January - March 2020

### We Are All In This Together

Dear partners,

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Africa grew from approximately 1,300 to over 23,000 in the last month, though limited testing makes it impossible to know the full extent of the outbreak. We expect cases will continue to rise sharply in the coming weeks, overwhelming health systems and disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. Though there is still much to learn about the novel coronavirus and its transmission, one thing remains certain: its effects will be felt most acutely among countries already facing shortages of health workers and supplies.

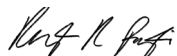
**We know that community and frontline health workers have a critical role in responding and containing this pandemic.** As our colleagues across the globe mobilize to stop the spread of coronavirus, we are deeply committed to supporting governments and local partners to leverage their health workforce to safely prevent, detect, and respond to COVID-19 and keep routine healthcare going. Together, we will curb the impact of this crisis.

**We have begun to put in motion a comprehensive response to COVID-19.** While our activities will look different in each context, we will work side-by-side with our government partners to:

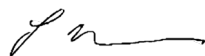
- Ensure continuity of essential primary healthcare services
- Limit health worker infection
- Eliminate transmission from known cases
- Support and monitor mildly sick patients in home isolation
- Safely triage and refer acute cases to higher level care

This is not the first time that we have been tested by crisis. Many of you walked alongside us to respond to the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2015, and then support the Government of Liberia to build a national health worker program that is now serving as the foundation of the country's COVID-19 response. **Countries like Liberia remind us that the best emergency system is a strong primary health system that provides equal access to all and can be surged at times of crisis.** Then and now, community and frontline health workers didn't surrender to the fear of the virus; they answered the call to serve their neighbors. We are fueled by the community of partners and peers that continue to heed that call—and are working to ensure the legacy of this pandemic is achieving health for all. In this moment, we are reminded that we truly are all in this together.

Keep safe, keep serving,



Raj Panjabi, CEO



Lisha McCormick, President and COO



Community health workers in Liberia learn proper infection and control measures during the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak.



*The Liberia Ministry of Health holds a training of trainers on infection prevention and control measures for COVID-19. Participants completing this course will be responsible for training County and District Health Teams, health facility staff, and community and frontline health workers (including nurses and physician assistants).*

## COVID-19 Training Package for Community and Frontline Health Workers in Liberia

- Community Education and Engagement
- Hygiene and Sanitation Practices
- Infection Prevention and Control
- Case Detection and Reporting
- Contact Tracing and Case Monitoring
- Protocol for Routine Healthcare Services during COVID-19

## Last Mile Health's COVID-19 Response

The West African Ebola outbreak underscored that a coordinated response effort led by government partners is necessary to rapidly deploy community and frontline health workers to safely prevent, detect, and respond to epidemic events. **Last Mile Health is working with Ministries of Health and local partners in Liberia, Malawi, Ethiopia, and Uganda to mobilize a programmatic response to COVID-19 that ensures community and frontline health workers are prioritized as critical to response efforts, prepared with the training and tools they need, and supported to ensure patients have uninterrupted access to care.** The organization is also contributing to the global response to COVID-19 through the Community Health Academy, coalition partners, and advocacy efforts.

### *Supporting Liberia's Ministry of Health to Train and Equip Community and Frontline Health Workers*

Last Mile Health began supporting Liberia's COVID-19 prevention and response efforts in January 2020, which has accelerated since the country's cases moved from 14 to over 100 in just one week. **Building on a long-standing partnership with the Ministry of Health, Last Mile Health is collaborating with a coalition of partners to train and equip over 4,000 community health workers and supervisors who have been deployed post-Ebola in the National Community Health Assistant Program to fight COVID-19 and continue providing access to essential health services at the last mile.**

At the national level, Last Mile Health is leading a critical component of the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 response to support the design and launch of a training package for community and frontline health workers to prevent, detect, and respond to COVID-19 in communities. In collaboration with the Community Health Services Division, this training has begun at the central Ministry of Health, then will be rolled out to County and District Health Teams, health facility staff, and community and frontline health workers (including nurses and physician assistants).

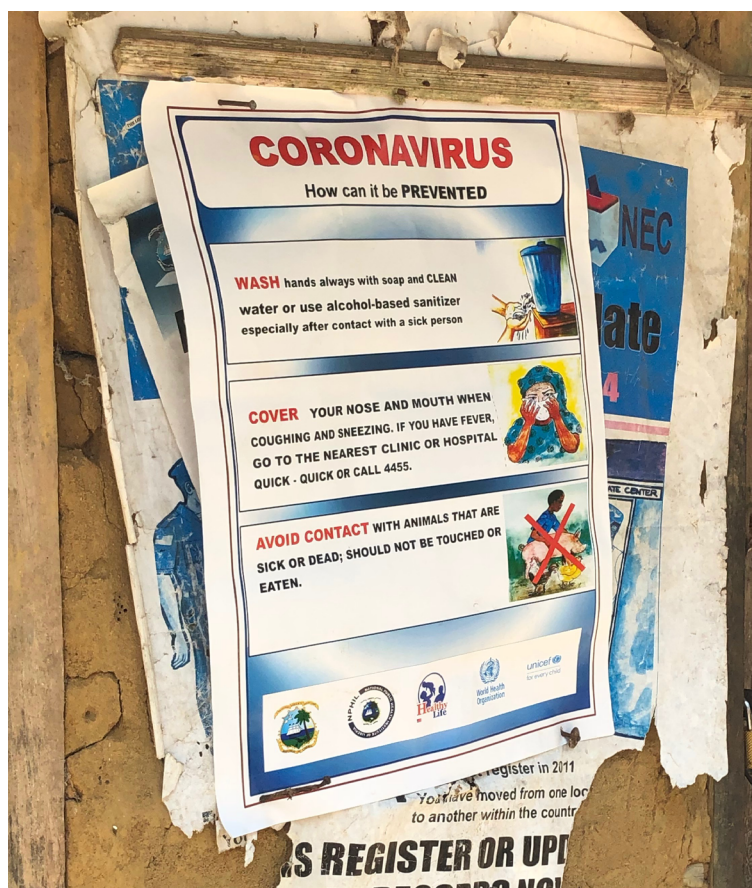


## “ REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19

*It is necessary to continue primary healthcare services in this crisis period to prevent other treatable conditions from overwhelming our health systems. We should utilize existing structures for emergency response activities including referral and surveillance.* ”

### Gahnwakpah Sarwah

Physician Assistant with  
Liberia's National Community  
Health Assistant Program in  
Rivercess County



COVID-19 prevention education posters developed and distributed by the Liberia Ministry of Health and partners.

The training package focuses on community engagement to promote physical distancing; infection prevention and control measures; water, sanitation, and hygiene best practices; household-level surveillance; and safe referral, isolation, and contact tracing for suspected cases.

**Last Mile Health is committed to supporting the Ministry of Health to go where the organization is most needed—which means supporting the response efforts in Montserrado County, home to the capital city Monrovia, which is the epicenter of Liberia's outbreak.** Montserrado is the only county not currently covered by the National Community Health Assistant Program, and urgently requires a community-driven response to the growing threat of community transmission. The Ministry of Health has asked Last Mile Health to train a new cadre of 1,500 community health volunteers to rapidly expand the healthcare team responding to COVID-19. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, community health volunteers will receive the full National Community Health Assistant training package and have the potential for subsequent employment opportunities in the health system following the pandemic.

As Last Mile Health learned during the Ebola epidemic, interruptions to primary healthcare can often be worse than an outbreak itself. **Last Mile Health and its partners are working with County Health Teams to ensure continuity of essential primary healthcare services while protecting health workers on the frontlines.** Working closely with the Ministry of Health, the organization is supporting the procurement of personal protective equipment—including gloves, masks, and shields—which are vital for health workers to keep safe and keep serving. In partnership with VillageReach, a peer organization with deep supply chain expertise, Last Mile Health has completed a personal protective equipment quantification exercise that outlines the availability of supplies for all health workers, including hospital staff, health facility staff, and community and frontline health workers across Liberia's 15 counties. Given the global shortage, procuring personal protective

equipment, oxygen, and tests will continue to be a challenge, but the organization is engaging with global vendors to determine what is possible.

Despite the strain on personal protective equipment supplies, Last Mile Health remains aptly positioned to work with the Ministry of Health to ensure routine service provision continues at the community level. Community and frontline health workers will be adapting to physical distancing and a no-touch protocol, both of which were essential to keeping health workers safe during the Ebola outbreak. They will also screen all patients and households for COVID-19 symptoms. With these safety precautions in place, community health workers are administering the package of essential, life-saving interventions, while supervisors continue to provide medical supplies and mentorship. **Due to the importance of implementing no-touch procedures, modifications will be made to high-touch service provisions.** Last Mile Health and its partners will resume full touch services once it is safe to do so.



*Isatu Lamin Gbarnjah of the Rivercess County Health Team with sanitation supplies provided by Last Mile Health.*

## SCALE OF LIBERIA'S NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSISTANT PROGRAM

*Cumulative from July 1, 2016 to March 31, 2020*



**3,800+**

Community and frontline health workers deployed



**3.1 Million**

Home visits conducted



**254,141**

Pregnancy home visits conducted



**968,227**

Cases of malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhea treated and malnutrition screenings conducted in children under five



**184,714**

Women with access to family planning



**4,691**

Potential epidemic cases reported



**100%**

Digitally-empowered community and frontline health workers



**363**

Community clinics staffed by frontline health workers

## *Partnering with Malawi's Ministry of Health to Design and Disseminate COVID-19 Operational Guidelines for Community Health Workers*

Since recording its first case of COVID-19 on April 2, 2020, Malawi has confirmed 36 new cases in just under a month. As Malawi's Ministry of Health shifts its attention to quelling the spread of the novel coronavirus, Last Mile Health remains focused on supporting them to ensure a strengthened and robust community health system is in place to offer both routine community health services, as well as much needed emergency response for COVID-19 at the community level.

**Last Mile Health is working to support the Community Health Services Section, and has provided technical input to develop a COVID-19 Operational Guide for community health workers.** Last Mile Health leveraged examples and learnings from its work in Liberia to inform the development of the guide, which is designed to prepare community health workers for prevention, detection, and response to COVID-19 at the community level. The guide provides information around community engagement and awareness, prevention and control measures, community-based surveillance, case identification and management, contact tracing, psychosocial support, and integration with existing community health programming.

Once the Operational Guide is approved by the Ministry of Health, it will be used as a reference guide for all community health workers across the country. The Operational Guide will be an integral part of the COVID-19 training for community health workers, which the Government aims to deliver in all 28 districts across the country, including Chikwawa District, where Last Mile Health will directly support the Government's COVID-19 response. Last Mile Health will print 10,000 copies of the guide to make it available to community health workers and district health officials during and after training.

## “ REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19

*Being resilient is about adapting quickly and realizing that there is light at the end of the tunnel and you will get there by working through your challenges. For me, connecting with colleagues to understand the [COVID-19] response efforts and what role we can have in them has given me a renewed sense of purpose. Life will go back to normal. But right now, we need to make sure everyone understands the importance of preventative measures.*

### **Ndasowa Chitule**

Director of Programs  
at Last Mile Health in Malawi



In April, Last Mile Health supported a workshop with the Ministry of Health's Health Education Section. The workshop—which adhered to crowd size and social distancing guidelines—brought together key stakeholders from Malawi's health sector to support the development and design of communication materials aimed at increasing public awareness around COVID-19. Messaging targeted specific groups including community leaders, women, youth, and people with disabilities, and focused on COVID-19 prevention and care at the community level.

As Last Mile Health deepens its partnership with the Ministry of Health, the organization is committed to supporting Malawi's COVID-19 response efforts and demonstrating value for the longer term.



## Contributing to the COVID-19 Global Response

Last Mile Health is leveraging its expertise in community mobilization, training, and digital health to support its partners to address COVID-19. Recognizing the enormous potential of shared knowledge, Last Mile Health will utilize real-time insights from country programs and wisdom from other community health peers to advocate, share methodology, and advise other governments.

### Ethiopia

Since July 2019, the Community Health Academy has been collaborating with Ethiopia's Federal Ministry of Health to digitize their health worker curriculum and avail and expand educational opportunities for the country's community health workforce—a partnership that has laid the foundation for Last Mile Health to now support the country's COVID-19 response.

With social distancing significantly limiting the number of training opportunities for health workers in Ethiopia, the Academy and the Federal Ministry of Health are leveraging digital technology in a **pilot program to educate and train community and frontline health workers starting with the deployment of COVID-19 health education materials on 600 digital devices** provided by the

government. The Academy is also contributing to planning and target setting for the country's COVID-19 response, including the development and review of blended learning training content for health workers. Abraham Zerihun, the Academy's Regional Advisor for East and Southern Africa, has been seconded to the Federal Ministry of Health to support this work.

### Uganda

The Community Health Academy's Regional Engagement Director for the East and Southern Africa Region, Kenneth Mugumya, is supporting Uganda's Ministry of Health to develop, refine, and distribute training materials related to COVID-19 case management for community transmission, infection prevention and control, and quarantine guidelines. This will build on Last Mile Health's on-going work in Uganda to promote the inclusion of community health initiatives into integrated, government-led programs.

### Community Health Academy

The Academy is launching a consortium of key partners to rapidly create and disseminate content on COVID-19 via online courses and an open-source library. The consortium is curating content (including text, animation, and video) in multiple languages that can be shared with general audiences over social media and via short, modular online training resources for community and frontline health workers.

The Academy is also sharing resources with its network of over 22,000 frontline health workers and health systems learners from 187 countries/regions. This work will feed into the Academy's forthcoming community engagement and social mobilization program, which will include a module on mobilizing communities in support of strong public health systems during emergency response periods.

Since March 1, the Academy has enrolled over 5,000 new learners who are interested in [building resilient community health systems that stave off global threats—from malaria to COVID-19](#). The Academy's second leadership course, *Financing Community Health Programs for Scale and Sustainability*, in partnership with Financing Alliance for Health and TechChange, will be available in September 2020.

## “ REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19

*Health for all is no longer a moral obligation for some, but a prerequisite to survival for all. The energy we have for the new coronavirus should be used to mobilize resources that not only fight the current outbreak of COVID-19, but that build the health systems of developing countries for the long-term so that preventable deaths from malaria, measles, and pneumonia become a relic of the past.*

### Abraham Zerihun Megentta

Regional Advisor, East and Southern Africa for Last Mile Health's Community Health Academy

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### Community Health Impact Coalition

In partnership with 16 peer organizations that comprise the Community Health Impact Coalition, Last Mile Health co-authored a seminal [position paper](#) on strengthening and sustaining the response to COVID-19 in low and middle income countries. **This paper has already been downloaded 2,200 times.** To deepen the work of the coalition, Last Mile Health has been co-hosting weekly knowledge sharing calls on COVID-19 topics, such as testing, community engagement and training methods, and protocols for personal protective equipment. This coalition will continue to advocate for community health workers as a critical component of COVID-19 response and share best practices.

### Promoting Resilient Health Systems

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the urgent need for universal health coverage worldwide. As part of its ongoing work to elevate health for all, Last Mile Health is participating in global advocacy and communications efforts in collaboration with partners to promote strong, resilient health systems that can respond to pandemics and provide routine access to primary health services. In addition, Last Mile Health is engaging with donors, funders, and other international stakeholders to prioritize funding allocations that support the COVID-19 response. The organization is also working on an initiative to influence governments, donors, and the private sector to ensure that essential protective equipment and testing materials reach community health workers.

## Recent Media

- [TIME](#): Five Key Lessons from Ebola That Can Help Us Win Against Coronavirus, Everywhere, with Former Liberian President Sirleaf
- [British Medical Journal Global Health blog](#): What the “Global North” needs to learn about COVID-19?
- [British Medical Journal Opinion](#): Prevent, detect, respond: How community health workers can help in the fight against COVID-19
- [Fortune](#): Millions unemployed by the coronavirus pandemic could be retrained to fight it, with Michael Weiss
- [NPR](#): How Do You Do Contact Tracing? Poor Countries Have Plenty Of Advice
- [BRAC](#): Delivering Health Services to the Most Vulnerable During COVID-19
- [Frontline Health Workers Coalition](#): To Eliminate Malaria, We Must Invest in Community Health Workers During COVID-19



## REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19

*We learned during Ebola that supporting, encouraging, and inspiring an organization’s most critical resources—its employees—cannot be overemphasized... That is why, during this period of uncertainty, you must prioritize your staff. Make sure they know how much they are valued and supported. You don’t know how much a colleague needs to hear words of encouragement.*

**T. McCarthy Kpaan**

Recruitment Manager at Last Mile Health in Liberia

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