

JOINT EVENT

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VHF outbreak preparedness in Africa: Strengthening community based surveillance**Asogun Danny**

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Introduction: Epidemics of viral hemorrhagic fevers (VHFs) have potential for devastating health, economic and social consequences. Most index cases of virtually all epidemics have their origin in the communities where the people are not empowered to recognize early disease or do not know who to report to. Traditional African societies have information dissemination mechanisms which can be leveraged on in empowering the people against outbreak of life threatening diseases. Early warning systems as represented by efficient timely surveillance systems that collect information on epidemic-prone diseases in order to trigger prompt public health interventions can be built on this enduring system.

Mode of Operation: Community-based surveillance starts when the people have been empowered to be part of the National IDSR mechanism of disease information management. Committees will be set up and trained to recognize and report any suspicions or rumors of VHFs. Local hunters for example must be engaged at community level as part of wild life surveillance.

Sustainability: The necessary political will and backing of governments and relevant agencies is essential for sustainability. The people must be made to know what their expected role is in preventing disease outbreaks through early detection.

Conclusion: Epidemics of viral hemorrhagic fevers with the attendant devastations can be prevented or at least reduced if they are detected early enough through the institutionalization of community-based early warning system as part of routine surveillance.

Recommendation: Community based surveillance system should be as a matter of priority should be institutionalized at all levels of government closest to the people. Disease surveillance committees with the traditional leaders as heads should be constituted, trained and supported to investigate and immediately report any suspicious case of VHF in their localities.

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