

Background

- Ethiopia confirmed its first COVID-19 case on 13 March 2020
- Community transmission of COVID-19 cases has surged in recent weeks
- The Ethiopian Government enacted multiple health system responses and public measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic as of March 2020 , including re-purposing of the health extension program (HEP) for community level COVID-19 response
- Recently, the government has shifted some of its strategies to include home-based care for mild and asymptomatic cases and community measures to manage the bodies of the deceased due to COVID-19

Description

The Last Ten Kilometers (L10K) project, implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., is supporting the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MOH) to deploy its flagship HEP to implement a house-to-house COVID-19 symptom screening strategy using risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) teams. The RCCE teams are a newly established innovation, composed of health extension workers, teachers, security personnel, and community volunteers.

The RCCE teams undertake house-to-house screening for symptoms of ARI and body temperature measurement, to identify and link suspected cases to rapid response teams (RRT), and to promote COVID-19 prevention behaviors to families and individuals.

In collaboration with other partners, L10K supports the MOH by providing COVID-19 basic training using virtual platforms, digitized screening guides and tools, personal protective equipment, and recording and reporting formats to strengthen the quality of house-to-house screening.

Ethiopia’s flagship community health program has been instrumental to effective COVID-19 response strategies in communities.

To strengthen the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

20 million households nation-wide were covered during house-to-house screening and home-based education was conducted

3,000 suspect cases were identified and linked to RRT

Conclusions

- Ethiopia's well-established, community-level HEP provided a responsive, agile platform for rapid and effective COVID-19 response.
- The existing health extension workers (HEWs) in the HEP, after being trained for community level COVID-19 responses, conducted extensive house-to-house screening and quickly launched community surveillance and risk communication and community engagement efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lessons Learned

The introduction of house-to-house screening strategy:

- Intensified the active community surveillance system for COVID-19 response**
- Enhanced COVID-19 suspect cases identification, linkage to RRT, and testing; and**
- Increased risk communication and community engagement efforts**