



PEPFAR
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NACP Liberia Strengthens Supply Chain Capacity through HRSA-funded RRHO Project Partner Engagement

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Background & Goals

Funded by the United States Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in 2017 and implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), the Resilient and Responsive Health Organizations (RRHO) project builds the capacity of diverse institutions or “impact partners” that include schools of medicine, midwifery and nursing, professional associations, and government ministries that contribute to improving the quality of health professional education in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Throughout the five-year project period, RRHO supports and complements HRSA’s Resilient and Responsive Health Systems (RRHS) initiative implemented by Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Liberia, and ICAP at Columbia University in Sierra Leone and the DRC. Jointly both projects strengthen the ability of impact partners to become self-learning organizations that are interdependent and can promote and capacitate South-South engagement with the goal of contributing to PEPFAR’s human resources for health strategy.



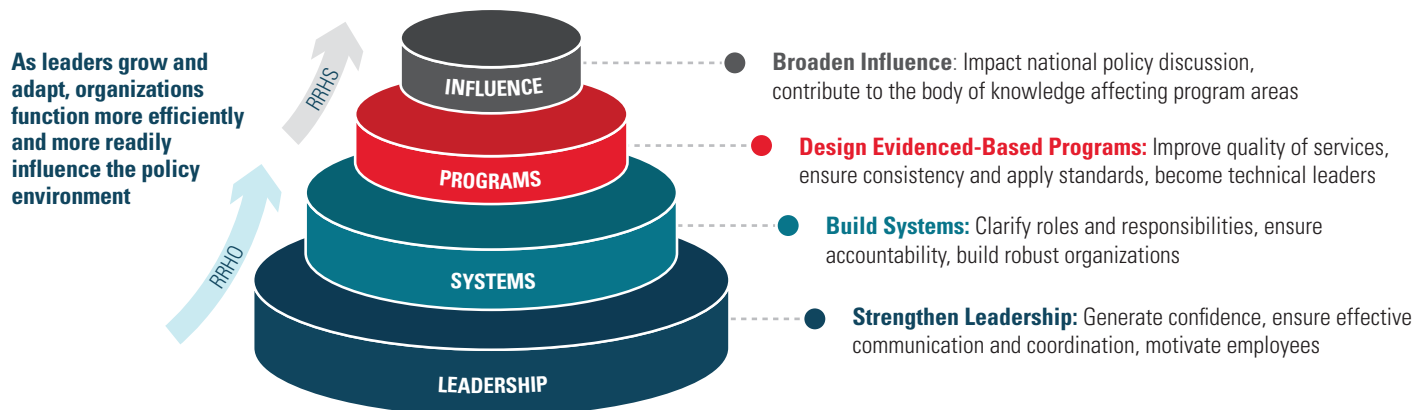
RRHO’s goals include:

- **Ensure local ownership through effective partnerships**
- **Assess and strengthen organizational capacity of partners**
- **Facilitate collaboration, information sharing, and peer-to-peer exchanges**
- **Support implementation of national strategies and plans**
- **Develop strong leadership and governance.**

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JSI's Building Blocks of Capacity Development



RRHO's Capacity Development Approach

RRHO recognizes that high quality education, skills, and organizational capacity are paramount to building strong health systems. Strengthening institutional capacity can be further complicated in fragile states still recovering from civil war, the 2014-2015 Ebola epidemic, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. With a keen focus on leadership and governance, evaluation and monitoring, financial and administrative management, and program and personnel management, RRHO conducts Organizational Capacity Assessments (OCAs) as a facilitated self-assessment of the organizational capacity of its impact partners. This OCA tool provides organizations with a set of criteria to assess their current management capacity to implement quality programs, and identify key areas that need strengthening.

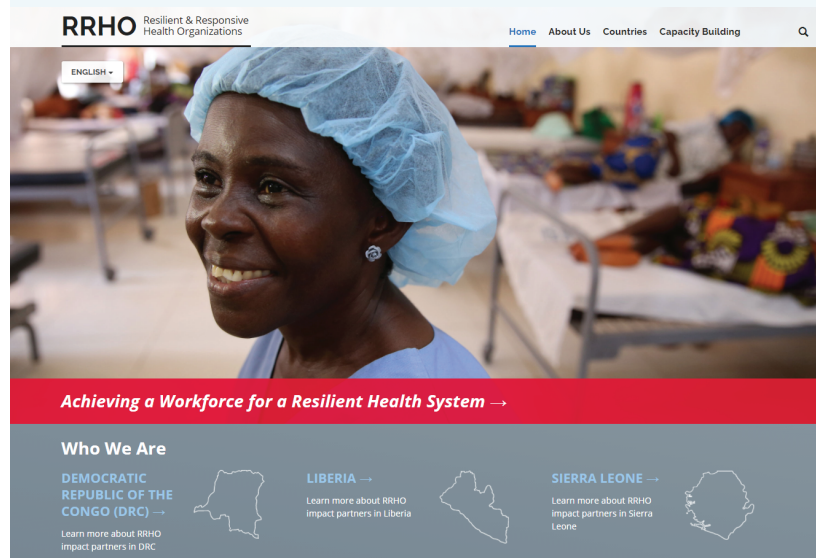
Although many capacity assessments exist, the structure and process of this tool distinguishes it from others. Multi-level and multi-department involvement fosters team building and organizational learning. Inclusion of management, compliance, and program components ensure a holistic understanding of the organization's strengths and challenges. The guided self-assessment and approach by skilled facilitators instills ownership on the part of the organization for its action and improvement plans. In addition to the capacity development action items identified as a result of the OCA process, the facilitated self-assessment process in implementing the OCA is a form of capacity development itself.

Strengthening the National AIDS and STI Control Program in Liberia

Established in 1987 as a branch of Liberia's Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Control Program (NACP) was launched one year after the first case of HIV was diagnosed in Liberia. NACP's primary goal is to

Accessible Resources for Capacity Building and Learning

To facilitate information sharing for capacity building, RRHO launched a website, resilientinstitutionsafrica.org. Impact partners are able to view and download national policies and guidelines that are often difficult to find online in one central location. Resources on strategies and plans to respond to emerging epidemics, and the prevention, management, and control of HIV are also accessible. The RRHO resource library brings together hundreds of organizational capacity building resources, including organizational, facility, and guidance tools.



attain public health control of the AIDS epidemic by 2030 with a vision of an AIDS-free Liberia, with zero new infections, zero AIDS-related deaths, and zero AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. Working across Liberia's 15 counties, NACP has more than 60 public administrative staff, and supports HIV prevention, treatment, care, logistics, and monitoring and evaluation across the country.

OCA and Supply Chain Assessment

In 2019, RRHO conducted an OCA with NACP and helped them identify seven key domains to focus on including: (1) governance, (2) leadership, (3) strategic management, (4) administration, (5) human resources management, (6) financial management, and (7) strategic information.

This OCA self-assessment provided the NACP Senior Management Team with a deeper understanding of its existing organizational systems and processes, identified gaps and capacity needs, and provided management and staff with objective criteria against which to measure its own performance. Based on the seven domains from the OCA and with RRHO's support, NACP created an action plan with action items prioritized for implementation.

To complement NACP's OCA process, RRHO also facilitated a supply chain assessment modeled after JSI's [Supply Chain Compass Tool](#). Needing to gain a better understanding of their supply chain activities, challenges, and gaps, the supply chain assessment helped NACP identify priority areas to formulate a supply chain action plan. RRHO used a questionnaire to assess elements of the *Supply Chain Compass Tool* and focused on the following seven areas:

-  **1. Strategic planning and performance management**
-  **2. Management information system**
-  **3. Human resources management**
-  **4. Forecasting and supply planning**
-  **5. Product selection and procurement**
-  **6. Warehousing and inventory management**
-  **7. Transportation and distribution**

RRHO Capacity Building Helps NACP Achieve Action Plan Goals

Under HRSA's leadership, RRHO was in a unique position to directly influence and shape NACP's action plans and strengthen how NACP could carry out its mission and mandate, improve its systems and supply chain efforts, and build an organizational structure to support the functions and operations of the organization. Many elements within the OCA domains and supply chain assessment were prioritized. Specifically, the RRHO team concentrated on the following areas:

- Developing NACP's first supply chain workplan and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for streamlining supply chain processes and systems. This included SOPs for store management, vehicle fleet management, as well as management of antiretrovirals (ARVs) in temporary storage.
- Based on best practices in logistics, refurbishing NACP's building and office space to create a safe and secure environment for managing and storing commodities and working more efficiently.
- Providing hands-on support, training, and rollout of data collection and analysis tools, facility guidelines, and results reporting.
- Implementing practical approaches for conducting post distribution verification visits and analyzing and reporting results.
- Building effective processes, strategies, and structures to strengthen NACP's organizational capacity including strategic planning, external communications, and resource mobilization.

With rapid and ongoing support from RRHO, NACP has been able to address many of the priorities and achieved several of the objectives in their action plan. RRHO has strengthened NACP's ability as an organization to function more seamlessly to achieve its mandate.

In addition to RRHO providing remote support from the US with some travel to Liberia, HRSA supported RRHO by embedding a regional supply chain advisor (RSCA) within the NACP Supply Chain Unit in Monrovia (from 2020 to 2022). The placement of the RSCA was instrumental in strengthening NACP's capacity, as the RSCA was positioned for ready access and on-the-ground hands-on technical assistance to build NACP's skills and close gaps related to workplanning, supply chain management and operations, and data collection and reporting. The RSCA also worked closely with the NACP Senior Management Team on data use needs—supporting achievements in the action plan. In just over two years and as a result of the RRHO capacity development efforts, NACP has made significant strides in identifying gaps and implementing solutions.

Work Space Refurbished to Improve Supply Chain Management during COVID-19 Pandemic

In June 2020, RRHO worked closely with NACP to establish a system to assess and track the frequency of emergency ARV requests. To ensure an uninterrupted supply of ARVs for people living with HIV (PLHIV) during the COVID-19 pandemic, JSI through the RRHO project helped NACP identify and refurbish a temporary storage room

to prepare in the event of a surge in demand for essential health products. Similar to the Ebola response, lifesaving supplies needed to be temporarily stockpiled to prepare for the increase in demand as the COVID-19 pandemic could overwhelm the health system in Liberia. With little time, RRHO worked swiftly to transform and upgrade the space and provide office furniture, laptops, and printers. The roof was replaced and the building was repainted. Doors were reconditioned and locks were put on all of the windows. An air conditioner was also installed to maintain the necessary climate for storage of ARVs. For the first time, the NACP Supply Chain Unit had its own offices, designated work space, and storage room for tracking commodities safely.

No longer did this staff of eight need to work in a one room office among stacks of boxes of lab supplies, condoms, and test kits. This Supply Chain Unit now had multiple work rooms and offices furnished with desks, tables, and chairs with enough room to conduct office administration, strategic planning meetings, and logistics operations for HIV commodities. NACP was better positioned to respond to the HIV supply chain needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff productivity increased and so did reporting. Turnaround time improved since the team had a more conducive environment in which to work and conduct their day to day operations. The additional rooms also provided the opportunity for social distancing. Clients had more privacy and could talk about sensitive HIV issues in a safe and private space. By early 2021, as the pandemic response was underway, NACP transferred all ARVs and commodity supplies and distribution responsibilities back to the Central Medical Stores while maintaining reasonable stock for NACP's laboratory use.

To work more efficiently, standard operating procedures were developed to strengthen NACP's processes. Items prioritized from the supply chain assessment and action plan included three sets of SOPs for streamlining processes and systems. In partnership with NACP, RRHO created SOPs for store management and for management of ARVs in temporary storage. NACP now had documented SOPs with a set of step-by-step instructions to help staff carry out routine operations to achieve efficiencies, quality outputs, and consistency.

“

Now the NACP Supply Chain Unit is organized and responsive to the demands of clients and provides services in a professional way.”

– Sando Dogba, JSI's Regional Supply Chain Advisor for RRHO

Created and Implemented Supply Chain Workplan

The NACP Supply Chain Unit needed a plan with goals, objectives, and a way to evaluate their performance. Based on the supply chain

assessment, RRHO worked closely with the supply chain officers, leadership, and other staff to create a workplan that included objectives, goals, and staff roles and responsibilities. Focusing on data availability and quality of supply chain activities, NACP needed to be able to assess and report on their performance, and share their progress with internal and external partners.

“

NACP is a professional team moving the program forward, strengthening its capacity as a government institution and being more responsive to internal and external stakeholders.”

– NACP staff member

Launched Post-Distribution Verification Activity

Identified in the supply chain assessment, one of NACP's priorities was to ensure distributed HIV commodities were properly accounted for at the facility level. RRHO worked with NACP to create a protocol for conducting post-distribution verification visits and tracking distributed HIV commodities at the facility level. This included the development of post-distribution verification methodology documents, data collection and analysis tools, a facility visit guide, and a budget to support the logistics of the post-distribution verification activities. RRHO focused on building the capacity of the NACP Supply Chain Unit to analyze, present, and prepare the written output report of the verification activities. Following the end of the first round of integrated national distributions, 17 facility level visits were conducted and the data analyzed. In early 2022, the first post-distribution verification report was completed with recommendations on addressing challenges and gaps. This was a milestone and tremendous achievement for NACP. RRHO will continue to support NACP in helping them develop action items for implementing the recommendations identified in the report. Working closely with the Liberia Central Medical Stores is critical to the success of NACP's post distribution verification activities as NACP relies on them to deliver commodities to counties, and then for counties and partners to deliver on to the health facilities.

Strengthened Supply Chain Task Force Priorities

The NACP Supply Chain Task Force was established with assistance from the RRHO project, and focused on identifying issues affecting the HIV commodities supply chain and finding practical solutions. Meeting monthly, this Task Force serves as a platform for advocating for workable solutions to improve supply chain services, communication, and collaboration. Membership includes the NACP Supply Chain Unit, RRHO, USAID Global Health Supply Chain Program-Procurement and Supply Management (GHSC-PSM), and the Meeting Targets and Maintaining HIV Epidemic Control (EpiC) project. As part of this effort, RRHO is helping NACP and the Task Force address supply

chain challenges and bottlenecks, and has taken the lead on helping them develop an issues log to document and communicate the supply chain challenges affecting the national program. One challenge that is now showing signs of improvement includes coordination and communication between the NACP Supply Chain Unit and staff from the Central Medical Stores. By the end of 2021, both groups started sharing updates on distribution activities. Additionally, collaboration between the NACP Supply Chain Unit and its GHSC-PSM partner has improved, as they now undertake joint field trips to address facility level supply chain issues.

Conducted HIV Commodities Quantification and DHIS2 Trainings

Quantification Training

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and other protocols, RRHO conducted an online HIV commodities quantification training for supply chain and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff from both NACP Liberia and Sierra Leone. The training, planned in two phases, develops the capacity of local specialists in HIV commodities quantification and supply management. Phase one built the knowledge and skills while phase two will focus on implementing the quantification and supply planning tools to manage national stocks.

Phase one included seven virtual sessions held throughout March and April 2021. NACP participants were engaged and eager to learn about the principles and applications for quantification including Pipeline and Quantimed software tools. Learners were oriented to inventory strategies and studied chapters in [The Supply Chain Manager's Handbook](#). Participants prepared questions for discussion, and reviewed country forecast data, forecasting processes, and software tools for quantifying and monitoring stock. The training sessions were recorded and posted on an NACP platform for easy reference or for onboarding new staff. The NACP participants have applied what they have learned after completing the first training course.



The aspect of collecting the necessary data for each step is fundamental and correlation of those data for use in the different stages of the quantification process is important.”

– NACP Liberia

Phase two of the training will be funded and conducted by the GHSC-PSM project to be scheduled in 2022. During this training, the NACP Supply Chain Unit will focus on the use of tools for quantification and monitoring supplies and orders for country level management.

DHIS2 Training

Accessing uniform data through DHIS2—an open source, web-based health management information system (HMIS)—is critical for NACP data reporting and analysis in Liberia. On a monthly basis, over 700 health facilities (public and private) report aggregated data on HIV morbidity, services, and interventions. These reports are submitted to county health teams where they are entered electronically into the DHIS2 platform with rigorous data verification to ensure good quality data are reported.



After completing the training, “I learned how to create datasets, analyze facility level data, and now understand the core dimensions of DHIS2. I applied the knowledge gained from the training to analyze data and use the data entry app to input monthly reports.”

– Claudius Paye, NACP M&E Data Officer

Understanding and leveraging all of the features and functionality available in DHIS2 can significantly improve data analysis leading to better decision-making and strengthen the planning and implementation of HIV services for those infected and affected by HIV. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person training was replaced with seven virtual sessions. Led by RRHO's DHIS2 experts, each two-hour session introduced DHIS2 concepts and building blocks, such as data elements, organization units, and form design. With the overall objective of understanding and using the different features that DHIS2 offers, including customization of health, disease surveillance, logistics, and laboratory information systems, NACP's M&E coordinator, data manager, officers, assistants, and volunteers took a deep dive into the DHIS2 database design and data collection methods. Staff learned about data analysis tools at the facility, county, and regional level; management of aggregate data and program indicators; and creating dashboards to identify trends and gaps to inform HIV program planning.



NACP staff participating in a strategy development session during the communications workshop.
Photo credit: Albert Timothy Dayyeah



NACP staff working on expanding their portfolio of partners at the resource mobilization training.
Photo credit: Sando Dogba, JSI

NACP was thrilled with the success of this virtual training, as participants received certificates of completion, and have applied what they have learned to strengthen their M&E efforts.

RRHO Drives NACP Capacity Development Activities for Strategic Planning, External Communications, and Resource Mobilization

In year three of RRHO's capacity building efforts with NACP, and alongside NACP senior management, the project recruited local consultants based on priorities driven by the OCA and action plan to conduct: (1) a strategic planning workshop and create a strategic plan; (2) an external communication training with strategy development; and (3) a resource mobilization training and plan that also included a proposal writing workshop.

In 2021, the NACP Strategic Plan was created and fully aligns with the priorities in the *MoHS National Strategic Plan from 2021-2025*, as well as the targets in *UNAIDS Fast Track Strategy to End the AIDS Epidemic by 2030*. NACP's five thematic areas include: (1) HIV Prevention, (2) Supply Chain, (3) Service to Key Populations, (4) Stigma and Discrimination, and (5) Treatment and Care with robust monitoring and evaluation across all areas. Outcome levels were documented to show that the evidence-based interventions respond to the global targets of 2030. This strategy created an institutional and programmatic framework to scale up interventions and improve outcomes.

Also in 2021, the outputs of a communications training and capacity development workshop drove the development of a *Communications Strategy from 2021-2026* that aligns with NACP's *Strategic Plan*. Complementing the *MoHS Communications Strategy for Infectious Disease*, this strategy includes a communications workplan that focuses on three goals to: (1) Reduce new HIV infections, (2) Reduce AIDS-related deaths, and (3) Eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination by 2026. With an emphasis on strategic communications, identifying new channels and target audiences, and highlighting behavior change communication, NACP considered the roles and responsibilities of partners, new funding modalities, and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to measure results.

As RRHO continued to prioritize areas identified in NACP's OCA and action plan, senior management was trained in resource mobilization and proposal writing, and a plan was created. As they continue to rely on the generous support from donors, such as PEPFAR, HRSA, USAID, and Global Fund, broadening the base of resource mobilization partners remains at the center of this approach. The *Resource Mobilization Plan* concentrates on international donors, Liberia's private sector, and the Government of Liberia (through legislative allotment). Internally, NACP remains committed to strengthening its capacity and utilizing the proposal writing approaches and tools presented at the training workshop to increase and expand its partnerships and funding base to achieve financial sustainability.

Developing and owning these three strategies and plans are a significant achievement for NACP and were a direct result of the sound technical assistance, partnership and investment, and leadership efforts of RRHO and HRSA.