



GHD | EMPHNET Newsletter

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Editor's Letter

GHD | EMPHNET continued to exert effort and collaborate with partners and stakeholders at the regional and global levels in support of strengthening the response to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Our main contribution was through the support provided to the region's Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) and the network of Rapid Response Teams (RRTs).

Over the past quarter, GHD | EMPHNET leveled up its support both regionally and globally through different endeavors, most prominent of which was the start of a new collaboration with the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET) to support COVID-19 testing in Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia. In addition, we have joined the global community of governmental and international agencies in the quest for the COVID-19 vaccine through our membership in the COVAX Regional Working Group for the COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment.

On another note, we continued our collaborations with countries in responding to the many public health issues and priorities that prevail, some of which have received special attention particularly Polio eradication and routine immunization. Our support in these areas has increased given the need to avoid interruptions in routine immunization programs, given that our region has two countries where Polio is still endemic and other countries are at high risk of Polio importation. The need exists for countries to carefully keep a close watch on Polio as well as other vaccine-preventable diseases outbreaks.

As we move on to the coming quarter, we continue to search for opportunities to contribute to COVID-19 research to inform decision-making with essential information on the pandemic, while remaining heavily engaged in supporting the region in its response to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic comes with immense challenges, but we remain committed to supporting national efforts in protecting populations against COVID-19 and other public health threats.



FEATURE STORY

GHD | EMPHNET COLLABORATES WITH AFRICA CDC IN ACCELERATING COVID-19 TESTING

In an initiative that calls on all stakeholders to coordinate, communicate, collaborate, and cooperate to support the control of COVID-19 in Africa, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) launched the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT): Test, Trace, Treat. The PACT initiative is mobilizing experts, community workers, supplies, and other resources to diagnose, identify, and provide care for COVID-19 cases promptly to minimize the impact of the pandemic on the African continent. Supporting the African Union Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak, PACT will ultimately help prevent transmission and deaths as well as minimize the social and economic harm resulting from COVID-19.

In its resolve to maximize support for the increasing demands from the region in the face of the pandemic, GHD | EMPHNET joined the Africa CDC in the implementation of PACT activities in Egypt, Somalia, and Sudan. Collaborating with the African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET) to implement PACT activities, GHD | EMPHNET provided support to these countries specifically in the identification, orientation, and deployment of community health workers (CHWs) who can assist in contact tracing and raising awareness among the public. GHD | EMPHNET supported capacity building for over 200 CHWs on surveillance, infection, and prevention control practices as well as laboratory practices. GHD | EMPHNET also provided logistic support to these CHWs to facilitate their work during field deployment.

In the past quarter and in each country, GHD | EMPHNET supported a Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop after which training workshops were rolled out targeting CHWs; in Belet Wayne and Merka governorates in Somalia; Qalyoubiya in Egypt; and Khartoum in Sudan. These training workshops focused on enabling CHWs to support case detection and management activities; contact tracing as well as recognizing, reporting, and following up on suspected and/or confirmed cases in the community. These CHWs are now deployed in the field, and they are equipped with personal protective equipment (PPEs) and data collection and reporting tools to enable them to undertake their tasks both safely and efficiently.

The trained CHWs will be of great support to their countries in the response to COVID-19, given the importance of community engagement in accelerating response to pandemics.

SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS

DR. KHWAJA MIR ISLAM SAEED

Dr. Khwaja Mir Islam Saeed is a recognized public health professional who has contributed immensely to improving public health training in his home country of Afghanistan

Among his key achievements is designing and conducting seven rounds of an intensive six-week public health training from which over 1200 health workers graduated. His other achievements include the development of many guidelines, strategies, and policies within the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). Furthermore, Dr. Saeed was one of the key figures who actively participated in the establishment of the Afghanistan Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP). He is currently leading and managing the Afghanistan FETP as a Technical Advisor.

During COVID-19 movement restrictions, Dr. Saeed took another initiative by establishing the Science, Epidemiology and Research (SER) Committee to technically support the Ministry of Public Health in response to COVID-19. In the past six months, the committee developed

and submitted twenty policy briefs which contained important discussion and recommendations.

Working initially at the MoPH as an officer within the Health Management Information System (HMIS) Department, Dr. Saeed was later promoted to various positions at the MoPH: Director for Public Health Training, Director for Disease Early Warning System, and Director for Grant and Service Contract Management Unit.

Dr. Saeed has been recognized for his work through awards granted by the MoPH. He has been chosen to contribute as an expert to professional and institutional forums such as the Institutional Review Board, the Pharmacovigilance Board, the Editorial Board of Ghazanfar Medical Journal, the Emergency Committee of International Health Regulations, and several scientific committees.

Dr. Saeed published numerous articles mostly on communicable and non-communicable diseases in reputable journals and presented his research in national and interna-

tional conferences. He has written a book titled "Introduction to Health Management" in his local language which is now widely used by health workers in Afghanistan.

A graduate of the Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) in the National Health Institute Pakistan, Dr. Saeed holds an MD from Kabul University of Medical Science and an MSc in Health Policy and Management from Aga Khan University.



GHD | EMPHNET SUPPORTS POLIO ERADICATION AND ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION

Afghanistan

To enhance and increase public awareness about vaccinations, the Ministry of Public Health, supported by GHD | EMPHNET, trained vaccinators and Community Health Workers (CHWs) who lack formal training and resources to effectively communicate the benefits of vaccines to ordinary people. Training workshops targeted low-performance provinces with high dropout rates to officially train the immunization front-line workers on interpersonal communication (IPC) to increase demand for immunization.

During July and August 2020, six training workshops on IPC were conducted in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces for over 70 vaccinators and 70 CHWs. To expand the benefit of these workshops, national and sub-national Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) trainers were also trained to replicate these workshops with front-line immunization staff of the remaining provinces in Afghanistan.

Egypt

GHD | EMPHNET supported the Egypt Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) in transitioning Polio program assets to support reaching targets for measles/rubella elimination in Qalubia and Sharkia governorates. These highly populous governorates are at high risk for Polio importation mainly because of their demographic makeup of hard-to-reach groups within slums and mobile communities of nomads.

During June and July 2020, GHD | EMPHNET supported the MoHP in conducting a series of training workshops on Polio program assets' transitioning. The workshops targeted Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) staff in the afore-mentioned governorates at both governorate and district levels.

Iraq

GHD | EMPHNET is supporting Iraq Ministry of Health (MoH) utilize domestic Polio program assets in high-risk areas to reach targets for measles/ rubella elimination. The targeted areas are within the following governorates: Anbar, Baghdad Al-Kerkh, Baghdad Rasafa, and Ninewa.

Over the past three months, a series of training workshops were conducted for health workers: Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) as well as Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) and Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs) focal points. The workshops also targeted community focal points from the afore-mentioned governorates. Sessions focused on empowering the participants' skills and knowledge in utilizing Polio assets for strengthening routine immunization (RI).



ASSOCIATION OF ARAB UNIVERSITIES AND GHD | EMPHNET EXPLORE COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Secretary-General of the Association of Arab Universities Dr. Amr Ezzat Salam and the Executive Director of GHD | EMPHNET Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, along with representatives from both parties, met on September 1, 2020, at GHD | EMPHNET headquarters in Amman, Jordan.

During the meeting, both parties explored potential areas for collaboration especially in areas of capacity building through public health-focused educational programs, training workshops, and academic activities. Discussions also focused on exploring collaboration in support of national efforts towards enhancing capacities of the public health workforce in countries across the Arab World.

As a non-governmental organization established in 1969, the Association of Arab Universities works to support universities in the Arab World and enhance cooperation among them.

GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION INITIATIVE DISCUSSES IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON REGIONAL NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMS

Established with the goal of eradicating Polio worldwide, the Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI) is a global partnership between the public and private sectors. The PEI is run under the leadership of national governments, and the initiative's main partners are the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

GHD | EMPHNET organized and participated in a virtual meeting between the PEI's core partners and country teams from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen.

In this meeting, the main issues discussed were the impact of COVID-19 on EPI-PEI integration in the EMR, the recent progress on the global framework on EPI-PEI integration, actions to be taken at the global and regional levels in line with Gavi 5.0 strategy, with considerations for their reflection in national plans in the context of COVID-19 and post-pandemic. Experiences, lessons learned, and best practices were shared on the integration in targeted countries in the context of COVID-19.

GHD | EMPHNET JOINS GLOBAL AND REGIONAL EFFORTS FOR DEPLOYMENT OF COVID-19 VACCINE

To accelerate the development, production, and equitable Access to new COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines, the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator was created as a global collaboration among governments, scientists, businesses, civil society, and philanthropists, and global health organizations. The ACT Accelerator comprises four pillars: diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, and health systems connector.

As one of the vaccine pillars of ACT, COVAX is focused on ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines once they are made available. COVAX is led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

COVAX has Regional Working Groups (RWG). In the EMR, GHD | EMPHNET is an active participant within the RWG which is providing technical assistance to the countries to create demand for COVID-19 vaccination and to develop national COVID-19 vaccine deployment plans, policies, and guidelines for the successful deployment and implementation of COVID-19 vaccination.

While it assists low- and middle-income countries to apply for the manufacture and delivery of additional doses through the Gavi COVAX Advanced Market Commitment (AMC), the RWG is also coordinating with different regional and global partners for the provision of required technical support to the countries based on comparative advantage. Once vaccines are deployed, the RWG will also be supporting countries to monitor implementation of vaccine uptake, to generate reliable data and management of information, to maintain a SharePoint of all documentation, to monitor the performance of vaccine safety systems.

EMPHNET WEBI SERIES HOLDS FIVE WEBINARS

On 18 June 2020, GHD | EMPHNET launched its Webinar initiative “EMPHNET WEBI Series” as a virtual dialogue opportunity set to reach out and engage a broad range of audience by creating an online discussion space, bringing to the forefront important public health issues and problems relevant to the Eastern Mediterranean region (EMR). During the past quarter, EMPHNET WEBI Series held five webinars whose speakers were notable public health figures from across the region and the globe. Focusing on public health issues in the context of COVID-19, the webinars discussed the following topics:

1. [Implementing Strategies for Easing Off COVID-19 Restrictions](#)
2. [Countries' Strategies to Maintain Immunization Achievements During the Pandemic while Adapting to Post Pandemic](#)
3. [COVID-19: An Opportunity for More Equitable Health Systems](#)
4. [COVID-19 Public Hesitancy and Provider Reluctance, Impact on Immunization Services and Mitigation Measures](#)
5. [Role of FETPs and RRTs as First-Line Responders during COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

GHD | EMPHNET ESTABLISHES REGIONAL COVID-19 RESEARCH GROUP

In line with its support for countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in research and innovation during COVID-19, GHD | EMPHNET established a Regional COVID-19 Research Group to identify research priorities, support, and oversee or guide research activities in the region. Members of this group are Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Sudan, and Yemen.

In June 2020, the group started working on research priorities with several meetings held to coordinate the work between countries. While each country is leading one research topic, all the countries are simultaneously working on other research topics to share, document, and publish their experience at country and regional levels.



GHD | EMPHNET SUPPORTS JORDAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN CONTROLLING BLOOD PRESSURE IN NORTHERN GOVERNORATES

To implement interventions that manage and prevent high blood pressure, the Jordan Ministry of Health (MoH) and GHD | EMPHNET are working towards launching and evaluating a blood pressure control program in twenty-five primary health care centers in northern Jordan. Through this program, which is funded by a two-year [LINKS](#) grant, the Jordan MoH and GHD | EMPHNET will adapt, implement, and evaluate the World Health Organization's (WHO) [HEARTS](#) technical package to improve the management and control of hypertension in two populous governorates in northern Jordan: Irbid and Mafrqa.

Within their collaboration on this program, the Jordan MoH and GHD | EMPHNET held two technical working group meetings which were attended by senior MoH managers, and representatives from GHD | EMPHNET and the WHO. The first meeting was held on July 23, 2020, and the second on August 23. In the first meeting, GHD | EMPHNET shared the results of a baseline assessment of northern Jordan's PHC centers' capabilities in managing hypertension. An important outcome of this meeting was agreeing on activities to be implemented by GHD | EMPHNET and WHO under the TWG's guidance. In the second meeting, the TWG members agreed on increasing the number of centers from 20 to 25 to cover all PHC centers in the governorates included in the program.

GHD | EMPHNET ESTABLISHES TRANSLATION AND LOCALIZATION UNIT

To bridge the knowledge gap in the region by providing specialized translation services that take into account the local context, GHD | EMPHNET established a professional Translation and Localizing Unit (TLU). The goal of the TLU is to make available a pool of material that is essential for public health practice in selected languages and contexts that are pertinent to the region. The TLU's specific objectives are to create a reliable source of public health literature that is sensitive to local contexts and backgrounds; to promote effective capacity building activities by providing multilingual training materials and resources; and to offer a reliable specialized translation service to international and national partners and collaborators who need such translation and localization applied to their material. The TLU will be providing translation and localization services in the following fields: scientific articles and publications; research papers and other technical documents; training materials such as case studies; website content; and multimedia.



GHD | EMPHNET CONTINUES TO SUPPORT JORDAN'S MATERNAL MORTALITY SURVEILLANCE AND RESPONSE SYSTEM

Under the leadership of Jordan's Ministry of Health (MoH), the USAID-funded Health Service Delivery (HSD) Activity and its partner GHD | EMPHNET are implementing Jordan's Maternal Mortality Surveillance Response (JMMSR) system. The JMMSR is a national system designed to eliminate preventable maternal mortalities by obtaining and using information on each maternal death to guide public health actions and monitor their impact.

For the successful and sustainable implementation of the system, JMMSR trainers and mentors are needed at MoH level. For this purpose, a series of Training of Trainers (ToT) workshops have been planned and conducted where a group of trainers and mentors who are familiar with JMMSR system, would be identified to transfer their knowledge and expertise to others working within the system. The latest ToT was conducted for the Non-Communicable Diseases Directorate (NCDD) staff and selected Directorate Advisory Group (DAG) members who are responsible for reviewing the JMMSR forms. The training focused on the JMMSR system's policies and procedures and aimed at equipping the participants with instructional design model essential skills, including Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE).

GHD | EMPHNET SIGNS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH JORDANIAN ROYAL MEDICAL SERVICES IN JORDAN

On September 7, 2020, the Director-General of the Royal Jordanian Medical Services (RMS) Dr. Brig. Gen. Adel Wahadneh and GHD | EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to facilitate cooperation between the two parties on projects, activities, and joint collaborations in support of public health services and programs, specifically in epidemiology and preventive medicine.

Over the past five years, GHD | EMPHNET collaborated with the RMS on projects focused on implementing the multi-sectoral One Health Approach in controlling and detecting zoonotic diseases, mainly brucellosis and anthracis.





From the earliest stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, GHD | EMPHNET began to provide technical and logistic support to assist response efforts in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). As a regional network for Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs), GHD | EMPHNET initially contributed to this response by heavily supporting FETPs whose epidemiological capacities were crucial to combat the pandemic. Furthermore, GHD | EMPHNET's extensive investment in regional Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) over the past decade proved to be a success during the pandemic where RRTs across the region continue to be deployed for field response to COVID-19.

GHD | EMPHNET began to intensify its support for EMR countries and public health stakeholders with the launch of its COVID-19 Strategic Response Plan in April 2020. Developed to ensure synergized support for selected countries, the plan included a comprehensive list of activities in support of cooperation and coordination, health information management, risk communication and community engagement (RCCE), enhanced laboratory capacities, technical guidance, RRTs, infection prevention and control, research, response at points of entry (PoEs), and essential health services. Since the launch of the plan, GHD | EMPHNET started implementing activities in contribution to strategic regional response to COVID-19.

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CENTER

Through its Public Health Emergency Management Center, GHD | EMPHNET escalated technical and logistic support for EMR countries' preparedness and response to COVID-19. Support included areas such as rapid response based on pre-identified country priorities; RCCE; information exchange and documentation; cooperation and coordination; infection prevention and control; data collection, analysis, and research; kits and personal protective equipment (PPE) stockpiling; and field activities such as contact tracing, field investigation, and response activities at PoEs.

The PHEMC also supported several training workshops: on outbreak investigation and contact tracing in Jordan; sample management for rapid responders at northern borders PoEs in Sudan; coordination mechanisms and Standard operating procedures (SoPs) on case investigation in Sudan; and surveillance and contact tracing for FETP and RRTs in Iraq; and RCCE, contact tracing, and COVID-19-focused WASH targeting the staff of National Center for Disease Control and relevant partners in Libya.



DISEASE CONTROL

GHD | EMPHNET provided essential technical and logistical support to enhance laboratory capacities, COVID-19 diagnostics, and infection prevention and control. For instance, GHD | EMPHNET worked with the Jordan Ministry of Health to strengthen the capacity of the Central Public Health Laboratory in Jordan through the provision of testing kits; PPEs; and instructions for sample collection, preservation, and transportation of specimens; and development of COVID-19 curriculum on infection prevention and control for training laboratory personnel. In Jordan, GHD | EMPHNET was also involved in the preparation of the National COVID-19 Emergency Plan.

POLIO AND ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION

To support health systems during pandemics, GHD | EMPHNET continued to provide support in essential health services, mainly in immunization services. GHD | EMPHNET worked with the Iraq Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Children's Fund in developing an immunization action plan to be implemented during and post COVID-19 and in providing technical support to maintain routine immunization services during and after the pandemic. In Afghanistan, GHD | EMPHNET participated with relevant input in preparing the National COVID-19 Emergency Plan. In Egypt, GHD | EMPHNET supported the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) in conducting a risk assessment, developing an EPI risk mitigation plan, and developing an EPI COVID-19 SoPs. Furthermore, GHD | EMPHNET developed a training curriculum on COVID-19 and Interpersonal Communication during immunization sessions to be used in upcoming training workshops in countries of operation.

RESEARCH AND POLICY

GHD | EMPHNET conducted research, developed case studies, supported proposal development, literature reviews, and created summaries from abstracts on COVID-19. GHD | EMPHNET served the Peer Review Committee of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and expedited call for applications for the Canadian COVID-19 Rapid Research Funding Opportunity. GHD | EMPHNET also developed the GHD | EMPHNETs SEAIRD Model for COVID-19 Transmission Dynamics. In addition, GHD | EMPHNET developed and designed different data collection forms and questionnaires for Kobo Toolbox and Go Data platforms. In support of operational research with focus on COVID-19, GHD | EMPHNET held a round of call for proposals that would be specific to research for COVID-19 in response to the countries COVID-19 priorities and that would provide evidence-based information for action.

HEALTH PROMOTION AND PROTECTION

GHD | EMPHNET developed various promotional awareness tools both internally and externally to support knowledge empowerment on COVID-19. GHD | EMPHNET created online and offline promotional material about COVID-19 in important contexts particularly in relation to maternal and child health and gender-based violence. GHD | EMPHNET also supported the development of promotional materials that were distributed nationwide in Jordan and Sudan.

WORKFORCE CAPACITY

GHD | EMPHNET escalated its building capacity efforts during COVID-19 by investing in training in the areas of field epidemiology and RRTs. A notable example is the customization of the three-month, basic FETP modality (Public Health Empowerment Program- Basic Field Epidemiology). Using a customized COVID-19 RRT Curriculum, GHD | EMPHNET also supported the training of over 100 RRTs in Sudan. In collaboration with Caritas Jordan, GHD | EMPHNET also supported training on infection control and prevention.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND NETWORKING

GHD | EMPHNET utilized its networking platform EpiShares and GHD | EMPHNET's various media channels to create awareness and promote knowledge exchange on COVID-19. GHD | EMPHNET also launched the Voices from the Field Writing Contest through which FETP residents and graduates participated with stories highlighting their contribution to response efforts in their respective countries. Furthermore, GHD | EMPHNET launched its WEBi Series, an innovative approach for enhancing dialogue among public health professionals who shared their expertise with a broad range of audiences in webinars that addressed relevant public health issues in the region.