



# The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation’s DELTA2 Project COVID-19 Response Mechanism Technical Assistance – Emerging Health Priorities

## Introduction and Overview

The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) is a recognized leader in the global effort to eliminate pediatric AIDS and one of the most successful international implementation organizations for pediatric, adolescent, youth, and adult HIV prevention, care, and treatment programs. EGPAF currently provides technical assistance (TA) at the national, sub-national, facility, and community levels in 17 countries to effectively support the implementation, scale-up, and evaluation of HIV, TB, comorbidities, and pandemic response and emerging disease management programs.

EGPAF has implemented HIV care and treatment initiatives and provided targeted, high-impact TA through U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) support for over 20 years. Through current CDC funding, EGPAF is implementing the five-year Delivering Technical Assistance (DELTA2) cooperative agreement for global TA, providing services to optimize the impact of programs supported by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (GFATM) to ultimately help achieve an AIDS-free generation.

In 2021, EGPAF was awarded American Rescue Plan Act funds through EGPAF’s DELTA2 mechanism to provide tailored, targeted technical support to Ministries of Health (MOH) and GFATM grantees in six countries to achieve their COVID-19 response mechanism (C19RM) activities and targets. The overall focus of this initiative, implemented from 2022-2024, was to support COVID-19 response and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on HIV, TB, and malaria programs, improving health and community systems in Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Haiti, Malawi, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

EGPAF’s TA directly supported country C19RM activities and targets, primarily through the identification and secondment of several Technical Advisors to address identified gaps, needs, and challenges in the pandemic response in each country, in close collaboration and coordination with Ministries of Health (MOHs), other relevant government entities, implementing partners (IPs), PEPFAR, USAID, and CDC missions. EGPAF worked with each country’s respective MOH and key stakeholders to identify implementation challenges associated with achieving the country’s C19RM targets at the national level.







Haiti

In **Haiti**, EGPAF’s TA bolstered treatment continuity for people living with HIV in the context of COVID-19 and Haiti’s political and security instabilities, supported **data management improvements and site-level staff capacity building** to prepare for future pandemic response, and mitigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the **pediatric HIV cascade**.



Cameroon

In **Cameroon**, EGPAF strengthened the **COVID-19 reporting and data management system** by improving the monitoring of Cameroon’s national indicators, which led to increased collaboration and reporting between key stakeholders. EGPAF also supported improvements to data processes/management systems and data quality audits and supported the development of the epidemiological surveillance data management national guidelines for accurate data processes and monitoring management.

 <b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	<p>In <b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>, EGPAF provided support to quantify current pharmaceutical product stocks throughout the country and to develop an <b>operational plan for the management of sanitary waste</b>, including ensuring the quality of the pharmaceutical products disposal process and the evaluation of conditions of collection, transport, and destruction.</p>
 <b>Uganda</b>	<p>In <b>Uganda</b>, EGPAF provided TA to the Ministry of Health to <b>develop long COVID-19 management guidelines and guidelines on the integration of COVID-19 care activities into the routine health care system</b> using lessons learned from integrating COVID-19 vaccinations into routine immunization. These guidelines aim to increase awareness and improve the ability of healthcare workers to offer integrated COVID-19 services.</p>
 <b>Zimbabwe</b>	<p>In <b>Zimbabwe</b>, EGPAF's provided TA on data management systems including <b>electronic health record system development, laboratory, surveillance and diagnostic TA, case management TA, TB and HIV program adaptation TA and COVID-19 response national coordination TA</b>. EGPAF was also able to provide key support for Global Fund and Pandemic Fund proposal development and technical support to the emerging cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe.</p>
 <b>Malawi</b>	<p>In <b>Malawi</b>, EGPAF assisted with the development of the Equipment Standards Manual and Specifications Scope of Medical Equipment to <b>improve the country's management of medical equipment</b>, in addition to creating a <b>computerized system for medical equipment management in health facilities</b>.</p>

Key themes emerged throughout the implementation of C19RM TA activities across these six countries. EGPAF Technical Advisors highlighted the challenge of addressing emerging health priorities and the need for health systems strengthening for improved pandemic preparedness and response. EGPAF has increasingly recognized the importance of a robust surveillance infrastructure to rapidly detect and respond to potential public health threats. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical role of surveillance systems in monitoring infectious diseases and facilitating early intervention for Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC). C19RM TA activities further reinforced the need for continuous investment in surveillance infrastructure, data-sharing mechanisms, and international collaboration to enhance pandemic preparedness and respond to emerging health priorities. Just as strengthening health systems was key to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to do so is vital for building resilience against future public health threats, pandemics or otherwise.

EGPAF's C19RM TA assignment included activities across the four core areas integral to fighting global health security risks: surveillance systems, laboratory networks, workforce development of frontline staff, and emergency management systems. In addition, during this assignment, EGPAF successfully and rapidly pivoted TA activities towards emergent public health priorities.

# Technical Assistance Overview

## Pivoting from COVID-19 to Cholera

### Response TA in Zimbabwe

After a robust planning period, in collaboration with the government and implementing partners, EGPAF hired four Technical Advisors to: provide TA to coordinate the COVID-19 task force and implement the COVID-19 response mechanism; implement and oversee the COVID-19 digital data management systems; lead COVID-19 case management and TB/HIV adaptation activities; and implement COVID-19 laboratory diagnostics systems strengthening and surveillance. Each Technical Advisor participates in regular Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanism meetings, national meetings to provide TA on COVID-19 and TB/HIV program adaptation, Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) sessions, partnership forums, and technical working groups to support the overall implementation of the C19RM grant and ensure the inclusion of interventions for strengthening the country's response to emerging health threats.

Following the declaration that COVID-19 is no longer a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2023, the scope of the DELTA2 assignment in Zimbabwe evolved to include key technical assistance toward mitigating the emerging cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe, as well as other areas that focus on health systems strengthening for pandemic preparedness, recovery, and response. EGPAF Technical Advisors provided TA to the cholera response at both the national level and within the city of Harare. As part of the expanded scope, EGPAF's Data Management Systems Technical Advisor supported the development and rollout of the national electronic health system, Impilo Electronic Health Records (Impilo EHR), which included a notifiable disease surveillance module to support integrated disease surveillance (eIDSR module) and provided TA toward developing the requirements for the malaria module. The Data Management Systems Technical Advisor also provided overall TA for the National Digital Health Strategy. EGPAF Technical Advisors provided support in various areas related to the cholera response and other public health threats. This support included assisting in the quantification of laboratory needs for the cholera response, integrating cholera genomic sequencing into existing platforms, and developing a comprehensive laboratory testing strategy for cholera. EGPAF's Technical Advisors conducted a thorough gap analysis to identify areas that required improvement and proposed specific activities to address these gaps. They also supported the development of the national cholera mortality audit tools, facilitated cholera case management training, and conducted readiness assessments at Rapid Cholera Treatment Centers.



Photo: EGPAF, 2023

## Integrating Cholera Response and Other Public Health Areas into Cameroon

### C19RM TA Activities

EGPAF and the Public Health Emergency Operations Coordination Center (PHEOCC), a unit within the MOH with a mandate to prepare and implement Cameroon's emergency public health response, identified challenges and gaps within the country's COVID-19 response. EGPAF recruited four regional Technical Advisors to strengthen the COVID-19 reporting and data management system by improving the monitoring of Cameroon's national indicators.



EGPAF's Technical Advisors evaluated the existing COVID-19 data management system and found poor quality of documentation and inefficient data flow and reporting. The assessment also revealed challenges with data transmission and accuracy, and issues with how different data dashboards worked with one another. EGPAF proposed an action plan with key activities to address the main gaps identified, and activities were embedded in the PHEOCC action plan for national COVID-19 response.

EGPAF's Technical Advisors have subsequently supported improvements to data processes/management systems and data quality audits, and the development of the epidemiological surveillance data management national guidelines. The centerpiece of EGPAF's C19RM TA work in Cameroon has been EGPAF's development of a National Integrated COVID-19 & Cholera Public Health Emergency Data Dashboard. This dashboard includes both the COVID-19 and cholera modules, given the relevance of both in Cameroon's context. The dashboard allows MOH staff to quickly analyze data and easily present the country's current epidemiological situation and was designed to be able to easily incorporate other public health areas including non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the future. This dashboard was presented and approved by the Cameroon MOH for use at the national level. To further support Cameroon's ability to respond to emerging public health priorities, the EGPAF team also assisted with the development of the Data Management Guidelines and standard operating procedures, a prototype for an Incident Reporting Tool for public health emergencies, and training modules to help healthcare personnel in universal health coverage activities.



PHE Dashboard for Cholera

## Addressing the Emerging Issue of Long COVID-19 in Uganda

EGPAF Uganda collaborated with the Ministry of Health and CDC Uganda to identify potential areas of TA need. Subsequently, EGPAF was asked to lead the development of Long COVID-19 management guidelines and to guide the integration of COVID-19 care activities into the routine healthcare system using lessons learned from integrating COVID-19 vaccinations into routine immunization. EGPAF recruited two expert consultants to support the development of these guidelines aimed at increasing COVID-19 awareness and identification and improving the ability of healthcare workers to offer integrated COVID-19 services, including addressing Long COVID-19.



EGPAF's COVID-19 experts worked closely with key stakeholders in Uganda to develop the draft Long COVID-19 guidelines. This effort supported Uganda to align and standardize national and district management of Long COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), though the majority of COVID-19 patients show complete recovery within three to four weeks of COVID-19 infection, some patients continue to experience its lingering effects and develop protracted illness and medical complications that can cause lasting health problems – which is now referred to as Long COVID. Given the recency of the pandemic, the evidence and literature on Long COVID is still emerging, and guidelines on diagnosis and treatment are greatly needed.

The draft Long COVID-19 guidelines developed with EGPAF's TA provide guidance on clinical management of Long COVID cases and give recommendations on client follow-up and other forms of continuous rehabilitation to clients diagnosed with Long COVID. The guidelines are meant for all healthcare workers in public and private institutions in Uganda, at all levels of service delivery.

# Lessons Learned

## Identifying Successes

Two key factors led to EGPAF's successful implementation of these activities, and specifically to the ability to pivot in real time towards emerging public health priorities. Paramount to the success was the close collaboration across Ministries of Health, CDC country missions and headquarters, and local implementing partners. In addition, it is worth noting the flexibility of the American Rescue Plan Act COVID-19 funding offered the ability for TA implementers including EGPAF to provide TA across project years, and through shifting Ministry priorities, without any delays in implementation.

Through the implementation of the C19RM TA activities, and particularly when responding to shifting or emerging context-dependent country priorities, the need for close collaboration and clarity across stakeholders was clear. Rapidly pivoting activities can cause confusion or duplication of activities. In Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Uganda, partner meetings were held, during which each organization provided clear updates on TA activities and discussed how to synergize activities across partners.

## Addressing Challenges

When priorities shift during implementation to respond to urgent needs, such as with the COVID-19 pandemic de-escalation and cholera epidemic resurgence in Zimbabwe, it is also important to ensure that originally planned activities and targets are not left behind. This can be done through regular, ongoing priority setting and clear communication with all stakeholders about revised timelines.

Finally, through implementation of this assignment, national-level Technical Working Groups have been essential bodies for advising, reviewing, and approving various tasks. This can be a time-intensive and laborious process depending on the engagement of group members, frequency of meetings, and stage of development of the materials the Technical Working Groups are working on.

## Sustainability

EGPAF's C19RM TA activities across the six supported countries centered on capacity building of local structures and implementers. In many cases, EGPAF's Technical Advisors were seconded directly to Ministries of Health and/or Prime Recipients, ensuring strengthening of national and regional health systems. Assignment activities also focused on not just addressing COVID-19 pandemic response, but on ensuring health systems were better placed to respond to emerging health priorities such as new epidemics, non-communicable diseases, etc.

## Conclusion and the Way Forward

EGPAF is dedicated to improving all aspects of national, regional, and local health systems through improving service delivery, strengthening the health workforce, and building leadership and governance capacity.