



COVID-19

AFRICAN ATLANTIC FAÇADE



Mr. Mohamed Salami, Head of the CBRN African Atlantic Façade Regional Secretariat.

The African Atlantic Façade Regional Secretariat's contribution to the mitigation of COVID-19 incidents

Introduction

The countries of the African Atlantic Façade have suffered the full brunt, like all the states of the world, of the unforeseen pandemic generated by the COVID-19 virus, with all its direct and indirect consequences on health, social and economic levels.

Faced with this situation, all the countries in question took action to try to mitigate the harmful effects of this pandemic, by mobilizing as much as possible, the human, material, logistical and financial resources available. Nevertheless, it is admitted and attested that none of the countries in the region was sufficiently prepared to face such a major and unforeseeable challenge, whose immediate and future repercussions, as we know, were going to be dramatic for the States and their populations. Hence, the many appeals for support and assistance launched by the countries concerned towards the international community.

In this context, the European Union CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative African Atlantic Façade Regional Secretariat did not stand still. It quickly wondered how it could make its contribution, however modest, to the efforts made by the national authorities of the countries in the region. It was therefore decided, on the one hand, to adapt the activities to the requirements dictated by the pandemic and, on the other hand, to initiate actions at the level of each country to support National Focal Points in the improvement of front-line actors' capacities in the management of persons infected or deceased following the pandemic.

As such, we can only appreciate the dynamics established by the National Focal Points who, despite numerous material and financial constraints, have managed to organize numerous training sessions, sometimes face-to-face and sometimes as webinars, relying on the local expertise and by capitalizing on the past achievements, in particular the lessons learned from the various

projects completed or being implemented at the regional level.

The pivotal role of the European Union, which has immediately reserved a significant budgetary envelope intended to support the National Focal Points in the organization of the various training and awareness-raising activities, was not, and cannot, be ignored.

Hopefully this support may continue in the future - on the understanding that the health crisis is not yet over and that its consequences will probably be heard for a long time to come. A word to the wise...

- Mohamed Salami

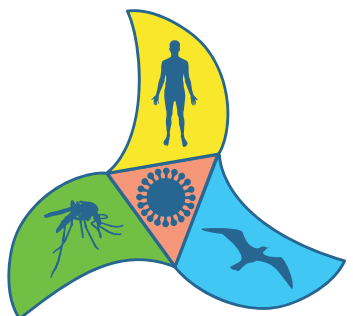




EU CBRN CoE: focus on Africa to counter outbreaks - Past, present and future

On February 24th 2020, the President of the European Commission, Ms. Ursula Von der Leyen, decided that a total of 15 million EUR from the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) were to be used by the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative to support African partner countries.

Soon after, Project 85 on “Strengthening Laboratory Capacities in Africa against COVID-19 and other epidemics: from set up in Senegal to scale up in Africa - **LABPLUS AFRICA**” was launched and Project 75 on “Preventing biological risks increased by environmental and climate change in the Mediterranean, Black Sea and Sahel regions by strengthening institutional capacities in the context of One Health – **MEDILABSECURE**” – was reinforced.



MediLabSecure

2020 marked the 10th anniversary of the EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative (EU CBRN CoE).

2020 will be remembered as a challenging year for the EU CBRN CoE: the COVID-19 outbreak set the bar very high for the Initiative to prove its capacities to support partner countries in the mitigation of CBRN risks.

2020 CBRN African Atlantic Façade leitmotif will remain: prevention and preparedness are our strength.

These initiatives reinforced the biological framework that had already been set-up in the African Atlantic Façade Region by the EU CBRN CoE Initiative, especially with the implementation of five projects, namely:

Project 48:

Improved regional management of outbreaks in the CBRN Centres of Excellence Partner Countries of the African Atlantic Façade

Project 45:

Establishment of a Mobile Laboratory for in situ interventions on VHF outbreak sites in combination with CBRN Capacity Building in Western Africa (EUWAM-Lab)

Project 35:

Management of hazardous chemical and biological waste in the African Atlantic Façade region and Tunisia

Project 32:

Establishment of a Mediterranean Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training (MediPIET)

Project 003:

Knowledge development and transfer of best practice on bio-safety/ bio-security/bio-risk management

CBRN African Atlantic Façade Regional Secretariat: looking at the past to build the future.

At the beginning of March 2020, when countries around the world were slowly starting to close their borders and lockdown their populations, the African Atlantic Façade (AAF) Regional Secretariat was aware that the race against time had started for African countries.

On **April 3rd, 2020** the AAF Regional Secretariat organized a **webinar to share baseline information on COVID-19** with its National Focal Points. In parallel, a questionnaire to collect information on

the status quo in each partner country was distributed to partner countries and collected information was cross-checked with the respective European Union Delegations to have the most precise picture on existing needs and capabilities.

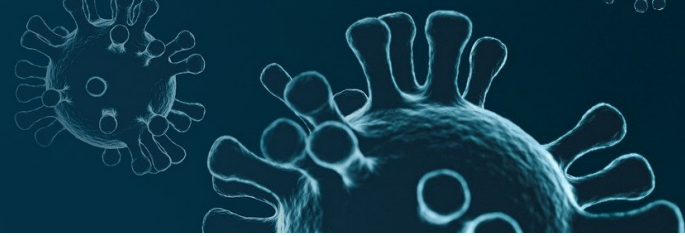
On **April 29th, 2020**, an on-line **Regional Round Table Meeting with the National Focal Points** was organized to exchange and collect information on the progression of the virus in the region. The meeting was an occasion for the National Focal Points to share their experience and the measures taken by their countries to counter the virus. Moreover, contingency measures and continuity plan for the CoE projects underway in the AAF region were discussed as well as available online tools.

The meeting’s most important outcome was the brainstorming on activities that could have been carried out by the AAF Regional Secretariat to **support the implementation of COVID-19 national response plans**. It was crystal clear, **the region had an advantage: it could build on the work already done**.

When the 2014 Ebola crisis ravaged West Africa, the countries of the African Atlantic Façade Region decided it was time to implement one of the regional priorities that was identified by the National Focal Points back in 2012: the management of outbreaks. Therefore, from 2016 to 2018, national experts were trained, and a regional task force was created through **EU CBRN CoE Project 48 on “Improved regional management of outbreaks in the CBRN Centres of Excellence Partner Countries of the African Atlantic Façade”**. P48 achieved better prevention and preparedness against outbreaks by



AAF Regional Secretariat webinar to share baseline information on COVID-19 - April 3rd, 2020.



Training sessions and family pictures from the 18 trainings on safe and dignified burial techniques and crises communication in Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Liberia, Morocco, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

adapting and enforcing the legal framework for disease surveillance and disease control, by developing stronger regional pools of epidemiological skills and experts, by setting improved regional surveillance networks and early warning response systems and by raising awareness. Moreover, the project supported partner countries in establishing strong emergency response plans at regional level, defining accurately the strategic intervention measures and the role of different actors to contain quickly the spreading of infectious diseases.

Two modules of P48 seemed most significant to National Focal Points in this period of COVID-19: the **safe and dignified burial techniques and the crisis communication**.

The AAF Regional Secretariat ready to take action

The AAF Regional Secretariat was eager to support local experts in partner countries to contribute to the enhancement of capacities to prevent and limit the diffusion of COVID-19.

Notwithstanding the non-first response nature of the Initiative, the European Commission did not ignore the request of the region. Thanks to an important team work, funds and capabilities were made available to organize activities in the partner countries.



A training session on "safe and dignified burial" in Sierra Leone.



CBRN Team Member of Liberia supporting the 3-day door-to-door COVID-19 awareness raising campaign.

Between June and October 2020, more than 100,000 euros served the purpose of organizing **18 local hands-on training sessions to understand the techniques of safe and dignified burial of COVID-19 patients and crisis communication.**

The training was led by experts trained by the EU CBRN CoE Project 48 and saw the participation of **400 practitioners** coming from the ministry of health, the civil protection, those responsible for burial in mosques, local and regional authorities, religious authorities, funeral directors and cemetery attendants, doctors, nurses etc... Training was organized in **7 partner countries** - Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Liberia, Morocco, Senegal and Sierra Leone - and covered several regions within each country.

In addition to the training sessions, a 3-day door-to-door awareness raising campaign on COVID-19 was organized in Monrovia, Liberia, covering five communities. The campaign allowed for the distribution of **2100 masks and 2100 hand sanitizer bottles** that were accompanied by explanatory leaflets to prevent the diffusion of the virus. The campaign, conducted by 35 representatives of the CBRN National team of Liberia, allowed for the sensitisation of more than 4000 citizens.

Online activities and tools provided to the partner countries

The African Atlantic Façade Regional Secretariat was also proactive from the very beginning of the pandemic in organizing an awareness raising webinar and in sharing COVID-19 related information documents with the National Focal Points via email and WhatsApp. The Regional Secretariat also worked on multiple opportunities with the National Focal Points to gain and share knowledge: online webinars organized by different sources were constantly monitored and invitations shared with the countries of the region. The two ongoing regional projects, P69 on the Management of risks in Chemical Facilities - **INSTASUR** and P71, on the Management of transport of dangerous goods - **SECTRANS** immediately adapted to the situation and converted the planned in-person training sessions into virtual ones. Depending on the specific situation of each partner country, some of the training sessions were organized online at the end by the trainers and in situ at the end by the trainees. Thanks to this rapid shift in the modalities of delivering the activities, it was possible to avoid a long stand by in the implementation of the projects.

Moreover, thanks to the support of project 71 implementer, an online training platform for French speaking African Civil Protection officers was made available. The different modules of the e-learning were intended to support all firefighters and first-responders affected by the Covid-19 crisis and to disseminate good practices in terms of prevention, management and mitigation related to biological risk. To accompany the participants throughout e-learning, six online meetings were organized. Participants from Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon,

Morocco, Senegal and Togo took part in the training modules.

A new life under COVID-19 and the resilience of a region

The African Atlantic Façade Regional Secretariat conducted a large number of activities since March 2020. Most of them were directly linked to COVID-19, others were part of the day-to-day business of the Secretariat.

In particular, the AAF Regional Secretariat finalized the work on the establishment of a **Regional CBRN Action Plan**. This work started in 2019 by the National Focal Points and National Experts who met twice in Rabat, Morocco in March and May. The AAF Regional CBRN Action Plan was not conceived as a simple list of common needs extracted from each national CBRN Action Plan, but rather as a common strategic tool for the region. The AAF Regional CBRN Action Plan is aimed at setting-up a training strategy for the region that will facilitate the establishment of a **Regional CBRN Training Centre**. Based on one of the needs identified in the Regional Action Plan, the AAF Regional Secretariat organized a one-week in-person training in Rabat, Morocco on October 2021 on chemical response management. This training was the first of a series of three and was attended by 20 first-responders from Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Morocco and Senegal.

The AAF Regional Secretariat continued to exchange with partner countries to ensure the finalization of the **National CBRN Action Plans**. In 2021, in-person National CBRN Team Meetings were organized in Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

The AAF Regional Secretariat also focused on the set-up of the **African CBRNE master's programme**. The course will be officially launched in 2022 and will allow for 25 French speaking country trainees to enhance their CBRNE knowledge.

Contact at African Atlantic Façade CBRN CoE Regional Secretariat (UNICRI)

– stefania.micucci@un.org

Contact at European Commission

– Anne-Sophie.LEQUARRE@ec.europa.eu