

Safe obstetric care in Sierra Leone in the light of outbreak preparedness and infection control



**HOSPITAL
PARTNERSHIPS**

Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin and the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital in Sierra Leone and the Holy Family Virika Hospital in Uganda

The challenge

Despite concentrated efforts in Sierra Leone to improve the availability of health services – for example by establishing a peripheral health unit network and reducing financial barriers for pregnant and breast-feeding women – large gaps in the health system persist in terms of patient safety and quality of care. According to the National Ebola Recovery Strategy for Sierra Leone (2015), only 35% of facilities possessed the basic equipment required for service delivery, almost all lacked basic laboratory services, and few facilities met the standard requirements for providing emergency obstetric care. This has resulted in some of the highest maternal and newborn mortality rates in the world, including a maternal mortality rate of 1360/100.000 births in 2015. The report also states that only 1% of facilities fulfilled the requirements for patient safety.

The largely inadequate obstetric care offered by Sierra Leone's already weak health system was further compromised during the Ebola epidemic that reached its peak in 2015. With around 10.000 Ebola cases occurring, many hospitals were forced to close down or reduce their activities, either to prevent Ebola transmission or because of staff shortages. Lack of knowledge on how to prevent and control infection and how to perform obstetric procedures under such circumstances severely compromised patient safety and increased the risk of obstetric wards in particular serving as 'amplification points' for Ebola transmission. It is likely that many women died as a result of the reduced access to appropriate care during childbirth and the loss of trust in health services.

Partnership activities

The first intervention area of the partnership will be capacity building measures. A midwife/nurse training programme on 'Infection prevention and control' practices for midwives and nurses to provide normal and emergency obstetric care and support in a post-Ebola setting' at the partner institution in Sierra Leone will be jointly developed and implemented. The training programme will be embedded in the midwifery curriculum on a permanent basis.

Furthermore, a south-south cooperation will be established within the partnership project. This will target the exchange of experiences and capacity building in emergency obstetric care and Ebola response through advanced training and bedside teaching by SL staff in the Ugandan partner institution. In addition, the SL staff will participate in educational modules for advanced training at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin or in other European locations.

The second intervention area is quality improvement at the facility. The local infrastructure within the partner institutions in SL will be upgraded to ensure adequate obstetric care and improved infection control and prevention.

In the third Intervention area, an operational study targeting an increase in facility-based safe deliveries in Sierra Leone through mHealth approaches (assessing risk factors for delivery through SMS contact or via a Safe Delivery App) will be conducted. The Institute of Tropical Medicine and International Health at Charité Berlin will provide support for the design, implementation and follow-up of the intervention, its evaluation, and the development of recommendations for health policy and practice.



The staff of the Holy Family Virika Hospital in Uganda © GIZ / Stefanie Theuring



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Euse
Kröner
Fresenius
Stiftung

Financing

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Results

- The project will build capacity and boost expertise for safe obstetric care in the context of outbreak preparedness at Princess Christian Maternity Hospital (PCMH).
- The set-up at PCMH for basic and emergency obstetric care and for infection prevention will be improved.
- A joint operational research project on interventions to increase hospital-based deliveries in PCMH catchment area will be conducted.

The partners

Institution in Sierra Leone

Princess Christian Maternity Hospital (PCMH), Freetown, is a governmental hospital with a capacity of 141 beds that was reopened in 2006 and houses the largest public birth clinic in Sierra Leone. It is the main referral maternity hospital for the entire country. Its main catchment area, Western Region, has a population of more than 1.5 million people. PCMH cooperates closely with the National School of Midwifery (supported by the GIZ health project in Sierra Leone) and provides bedside teaching for student nurses and midwives.

Institution in Uganda

Virika Hospital (VH), Fort Portal, has a capacity of 155 beds and serves patients from six surrounding districts. The area of maternal and neonatal health was significantly strengthened by an ESTHER partnership between VH and the Institute of Tropical Medicine and International Health between 2010 and 2016. The hospital has substantial expertise in obstetrics and gynaecology and serves as a referral institution. In Western Uganda, haemorrhagic fevers including Ebola are repeatedly registered; as a result, VH has long-standing Ebola response mechanisms at its command and is ideally suited as a south-south cooperation partner within this partnership.

Institution in Germany

Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin is one of the largest university clinics in Europe. The Institute of Tropical Medicine and International Health (ITMIH) offers patient care, education, training and research, including on malaria, HIV/AIDS, infection epidemiology, viral haemorrhagic fever and public health in developing countries. ITMIH has already successfully established long-standing ESTHER partnerships with Rwanda and Uganda.

Overview

Name	Safe obstetric care in Sierra Leone in the light of outbreak preparedness and infection control	
Impact	Improving the quality of obstetric care in SL with particular reference to the post-Ebola scenario	
Countries	Sierra Leone Uganda	Germany
Cities	Freetown Fort Portal	Berlin
Institutions	Princess Christian Maternity Hospital Virika Hospital	Charité Berlin
Term	July 2017 – April 2019	
Budget	110.000 EURO	

Contact person for the partnership

Charité – Universitätsmedizin

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