

# STRENGTHENING EPIDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

As the world meets to discuss how to organize and coordinate global pandemic preparedness efforts, country governments and Resolve to Save Lives (RTSL) provide a timely reminder that national structures that support local efforts and political engagement are the building blocks for a world that is better prepared for the next epidemic.

Over the past five years, with RTSL's support, national governments have learned what works to strengthen preparedness by piloting different approaches. Five core recommendations have emerged:

## 1 **Activate political leadership and a multisectoral coordination mechanism.**

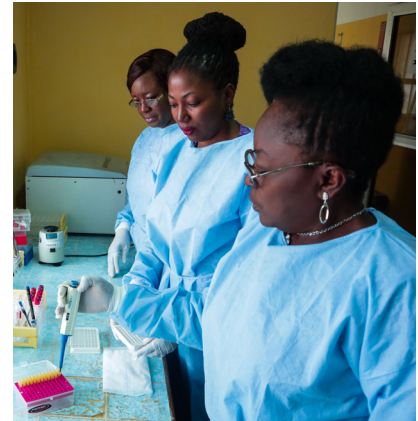
Insufficient political will and weak program management can create roadblocks to implementing preparedness efforts efficiently. Preparedness systems alone are not sufficient to address health threats without effective, committed and consistent leadership — from the day-to-day management of multisectoral activities up to the highest level of a country's government.

## 2 **Establish dedicated teams to accelerate epidemic preparedness.**

Preparedness requires dedicated human resources; however, many countries rely on teams primarily responsible for emergency response. RTSL has partnered with countries to design, fund and implement dedicated preparedness teams embedded within governments. Pilots have shown that countries with such teams outperformed others in improved preparedness capabilities. A dedicated multisectoral preparedness team can accelerate the development, prioritization and implementation of realistic plans to make a country better prepared for epidemics.

## 3 **Adopt an accessible tracking system to steer preparedness plan implementation and strengthen accountability.**

Preparedness plans are complex, operating across many different technical areas. Without clear prioritization, plans tend to be unwieldy and difficult to execute. Creating and tracking progress of implementation against an operational plan provides a shared overview across sectors, facilitates collaboration by providing data across sectors and increases accountability by improving visibility and transparency of activities by stakeholders. Using this data to drive decision-making can help countries continuously refine their plans.



**Global health security must begin with preparedness and response infrastructure at the country level.**



**4 Adopt timeliness metrics to drive performance improvement.**

All elements of the health security system — from laboratories and surveillance to health coverage and leadership — must work together to detect and respond to disease threats. Timeliness is a start-to-end assessment of the speed with which a system detects and responds to threats. As a target, RTSL proposes [7-1-7](#): 7 days to detect, 1 day to report to public health authorities and initiate response and 7 days to mount an effective initial response. Timeliness metrics provide real-time data that reflects the performance of the system and highlights opportunities for quality improvement.

**5 Streamline partnerships and promote alignment to improve support.**

The global health landscape is prone to fragmentation, which undermines effectiveness. Health leaders in Africa have repeatedly urged development partners to better coordinate efforts when supporting countries to strengthen health security. Yet donors and partners continue to lack coordination and often duplicate efforts. [Flexible funding](#) that can be allocated across priority projects that is tracked and reported against donor commitments will reduce duplication and allow for contextualized decision-making based on country needs.

Technical rigor, political leadership and operational excellence must work together in tandem for a country to become better prepared for the next epidemic. The five steps outlined above can help countries make substantial, steady and sustained progress. **Global health security must begin with preparedness and response infrastructure at the country level.**