

MAKING CONNECTIONS

STORIES OF INTEGRATION IN
OUTBREAK RESPONSE



From Ebola to COVID-19

Setting the scene

When COVID-19 started to spread, initial epidemiological projections suggested that the densely populated capital city of Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), would be heavily affected. Save the Children was well-positioned to support the government's COVID-19 response because of its significant humanitarian response experience from 10 Ebola outbreaks in eastern Congo and established development programs in the Kinshasa area. With support from leadership, Save the Children's operational and technical teams in the eastern cities of Goma and Kinshasa began collaboration immediately to develop and implement a response plan that would control and mitigate the disease and enable better public health outcomes in supported communities. Staff well-being, continuity of program activities, and program preparedness and response were the foundational pillars that guided this plan. A preexisting, multi-year Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health development program in 64 health facilities and covering the health needs of nearly two million people in the Tshangu district provided the geographical and operational footprint for Save the Children's COVID-19 response interventions.

The integration journey

Save the Children's strategic decision to join humanitarian and development programs was important for enabling a quick response to the pending COVID-19 public health crisis, as it allowed the team to leverage existing relationships with the community, the Ministry of Health, regional governmental health departments, and health workers. It also allowed for the utilization of existing financial, human, and operational resources to quickly launch the response.

What can you learn from this story?



Become one team with shared public health objectives. Do not work in silos.



Organize effective and systematic meetings with clear agendas and purposes.



An existing development program with a big geographical operational footprint can integrate humanitarian response and have a greater impact during an outbreak. In high-risk areas, have these conversations in advance with donors in order to map and understand options for quick program modifiers if an outbreak occurs.



Use funding from ongoing projects and other humanitarian seed funding to get started as you reach out to donors for award and financial adaptations or to develop new proposals.

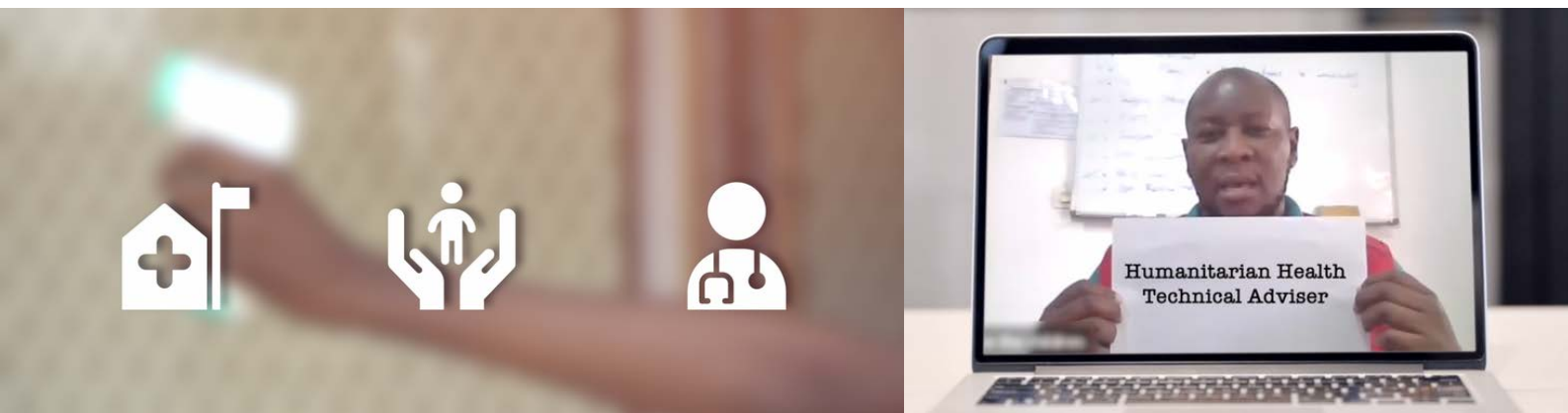


Response plans and other tools should be adaptable to the context and community needs.

A key lesson learned from previous Ebola outbreak responses was the importance of integrating multi-sectoral holistic humanitarian services. Save the Children's Humanitarian Health Advisor, who led the initial COVID-19 response team, built on the organization's Ebola humanitarian response plan and applied it to the COVID-19 work before global tools and guidance were available. He strategically brought together technical staff from health, WASH, nutrition, and child protection as the minimum essential sectors for an integrated approach, as well as operational and management staff from development and humanitarian teams. During the initial readiness and response phase, the teams held twice-weekly public health meetings to ensure a joint virtual working space to collaborate and prioritize actions while developing and implementing the response plan. Integration became a daily activity and helped to ensure that sectors and programs were working together, rather than in silos. In collaboration with donors, existing funding was merged with new funding and provided the financial means to start activities while budget adaptations were ongoing.

Health and WASH teams focused on the safety of the organization's staff and the Ministry of Health's health workers to ensure continuity of essential primary health services and Save the Children's program activities in targeted communities. An integrated needs assessment provided more details about the situation and specific needs of the health facilities and the community. As a child rights organization, Save the Children also integrated child protection throughout its interventions to mitigate the negative impact that the necessary COVID-19 public health measures had on the children of these communities.

Specifically, trainings of health workers, teachers, local partners, and community stakeholders included best practices on identification, referral, and treatment for child abuse cases and psychosocial support considerations for children, adolescents, and families during the COVID-19 response.



Suggested readings

- [Integrated Response Framework for Isolation and Quarantine as Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions against COVID-19](#), READY Initiative, March 2021.
- [Integrating in less than 5 min](#), READY initiative, May 2021.
- [Ebola Virus Disease Guinea Outbreak 2021: Multi-country Strategic Readiness and Response Plan, Operational Planning Guidelines](#), World Health Organization, 2021.
- [Learning from the Fight Against Ebola to More Effectively Tackle COVID-19 in Fragile States](#), Search for Common Ground, April 2020.

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