

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

January - March 2023

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PROVIDING EFFICIENT AND TIMELY DELIVERY OF DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES AMIDST CYCLONE FREDDY AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

It was just like any other day for most Malawians when we heard the news about cyclone Freddy. The authorities had warned us about its landing in the Southern region, but none of us knew how devastating it was going to be. As the wind picked up the pace, the skies turned darker and the rains became stronger, a lot of houses in the southern region began to creak and shake. Occupants could hear the roof and walls starting to give way until some of the houses fell.

A state of emergency was declared on the 13th of March 2023. Most victims had to leave their homes, and with each passing moment, their worries only grew stronger. The cyclone affected **11** R4H target districts in the southern region namely, Blantyre, Chiradzulu, Mangochi, Machinga, Mwanza, Mulanje, Thyolo, Phalombe, Zomba, Chikwawa, and Nsanje.

Despite the challenges of the cyclone, the transportation of clinical samples and results from health facilities to laboratories continued. From January to March, **143,909** samples were transported from health facilities to district or molecular laboratories for diagnosis and **180,833** results were transported back to the health facilities. Thanks to the courier's commitment to delivering samples and results with diligence, showcasing their dedication to improving the lives of individuals in remote communities.

Precious Makono, ST Courier narrates "I have been working as a Sample Transport courier for Phalombe district since 2016. So far, Cyclone Freddy has been the worst. It affected my work and my day-to-day welfare. Five health facilities namely; Nkhulambe, Sukasanje, Mulungu Alinafe, Nambazo and Phalombe health centre were affected due to my unavailability to transport samples and results. Even though this was the case, I still managed to catch up on my work after the cyclone ceased".



Precious Makono's house (ST Courier for Phalombe) after being hit by Cyclone Freddy- Phalombe district (Photo taken by Precious Makono)

Even though it might seem like Cyclone Freddy was the only challenge, there are some areas which are hard to reach due to terrain and other geographical challenges. Rameck Chavula; Sample Transport Courier at Mphompha village in Rumphi reports, “We face topographic challenges due to hills and rivers which cover most of Rumphi district. Couriers struggle to transport samples during rainy seasons as most dusty roads become slippery” explained Chavula.



Rameck Chavula's Motorcycle captured on his way to Mphompha Health Centre in Rumphi (Photo credit: Rameck Chavula)

Sample Transport Couriers are crucial, especially during pandemics, where the prompt analysis of samples is vital in achieving accurate diagnosis to stem the spread of disease.



Lungwena bridge connecting 7 health facilities to the district laboratory in Mangochi (Photo taken by Levi Mzumara after Cyclone Freddy)

In Mangochi; Lungwena bridge which connects 7 health facilities to the district laboratory was damaged and transportation of samples was only affected in the week of 24th March 2023. The affected facilities include; Lungwena, Namalaka, Kadango, Mgola, Makanjila, Lulanga and Maganga. Even though it might seem like Cyclone Freddy was the only challenge, there are some areas which are hard to reach due to terrain and other geographical challenges. Rameck Chavula; Sample Transport Courier in Rumphi reports, “We face topographic challenges due to hills and rivers which cover most of Rumphi district. Couriers struggle to transport samples during rainy seasons as most dusty roads become slippery”, explained Chavula.

The successful clinical sample transportation during and immediately after Cyclone Freddy and other environmental challenges is a testament to the importance of proactive planning and effective communication in ensuring the sustainability of healthcare.

SAMPLES TRANSPORTED FROM HEALTH FACILITIES

KEY FIGURES (Jan- March 2023)

Total Samples transported- 143,909

Total results transported - 180,833

ABOUT R4H RESOURCE MOBILIZATION TEAM

Q& A with Ruth Rensberg, Strategy and Resource Mobilisation Advisor



Resource Mobilization team orientation meeting with Riders Nigeria visitors

1. Give a brief background of R4H Resource Mobilization team.

The Resource Mobilization team works across and with departments to ensure that resources are raised to build the resilience and reach of R4H.

2. What are the strategies used by the Resource Mobilization Team in getting funds?

Multiple methods are utilized including grant proposals, tenders, bids, as well as internet-based fundraising including

social media and newsletters.

3. Have there been any activities initiated by the RM team?

The team has undertaken several activities including building the capacity of staff and establishing resource mobilization related practices in the organization. It has an available toolkit which includes a proposal tracker and a go no go matrix as some examples. The Department was also recently responsible for raising funds to respond to Cyclone Freddy in the country. A small proposal was also issued to a Local Embassy to consider the Road Safety work of the organization.

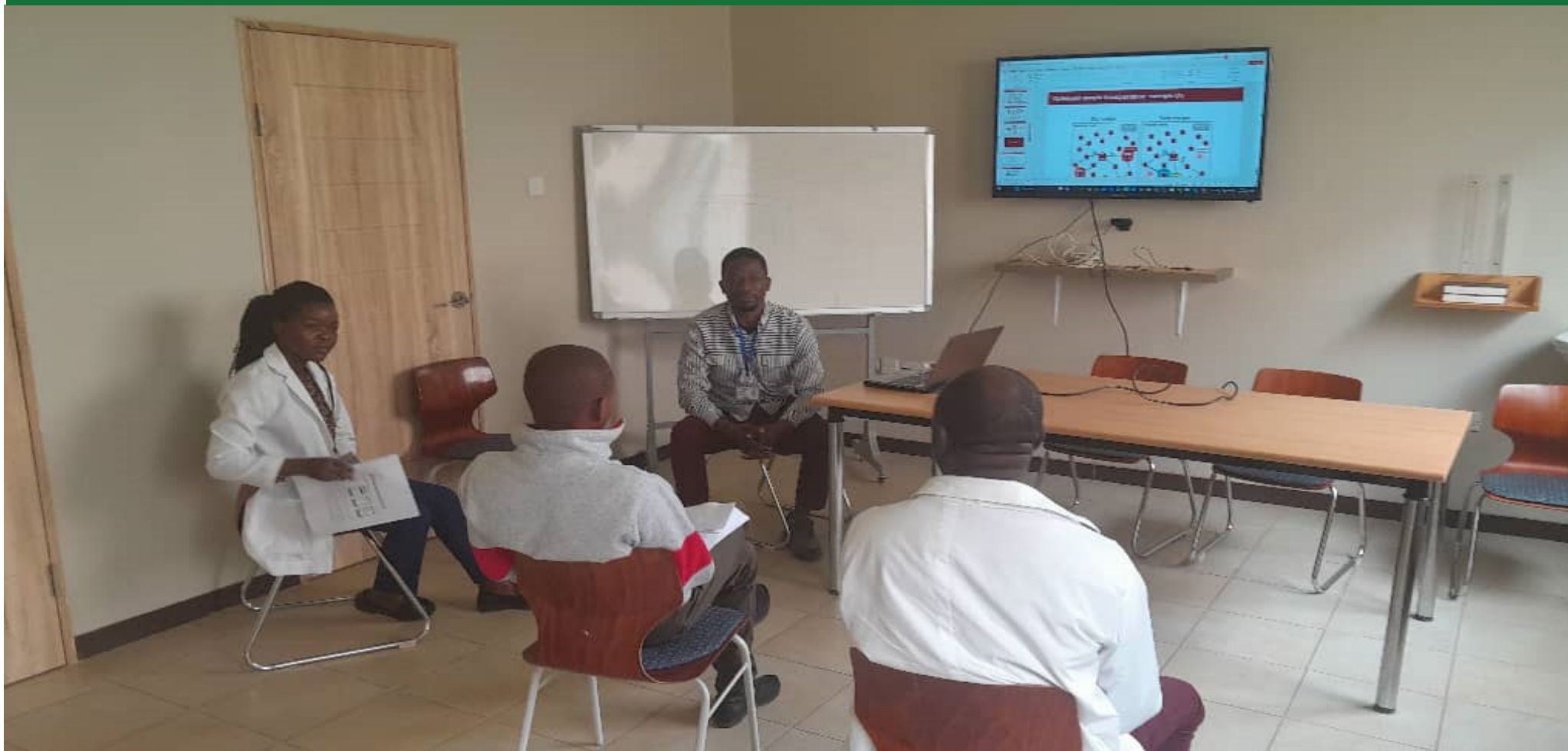
4. May you please share lessons learnt from the bids made, bid processes, other activities and meeting?

As a team we have learnt that we need to develop a country funding plan which sets down the amounts we would like to raise funds for, funds we have covered as well as funds that we hope to obtain. This will be in place by the end of May 2023. We have also learnt that there must be sufficient time to develop and work on bid applications.

5. What are the best practices the team can adopt?

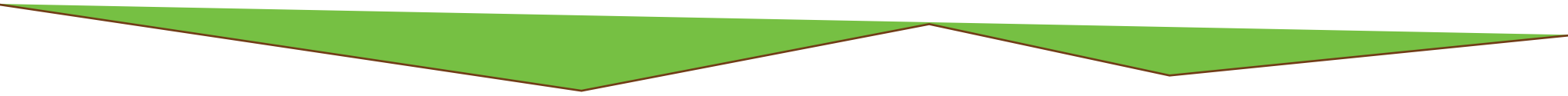
Best practices include learning whilst working as a team.

INTRODUCTION OF SAMPLE TRANSPORT PROGRAM TO PRIVATE CLINICS



Emmanuel Ngwira, R4H Sample Transport Program Officer Orienting Health care workers at Wezi Private Clinic in Mzimba North (Photo by Kumbukani Komakoma)

Private clinics are saving time by not having to transport samples themselves, allowing them to focus on their core business of providing healthcare services. On 17th March, 2023 R4H introduced its optimized and scheduled sample transport systems to private clinic owners. The orientation was held at R4H Offices in Lilongwe.



R4H specializes in transporting clinical samples, which ensures that samples are transported efficiently and professionally using 2 systems: Optimized and Scheduled route systems. Lawrence Kachule, Program Manager- Innovation & Digitalization explained “For the Push system, there are scheduled, or fixed routes designed for couriers to visit health care facilities to pick clinical samples and drop laboratory test results. In the pull or optimized sample transport system, courier visits are dependent on demand by healthcare facilities through sending of USSD messages on sample volumes by individual healthcare facilities. Similarly, routes to healthcare facilities are scheduled based on the availability of laboratory test results”.

“It is crucial to transport clinical samples from private clinics to laboratories as quickly as possible to ensure accurate test results” Angellina Nazombe, Programs Manager- Quality Assurance explained.

“With dedicated clinical sample transportation, private clinics can ensure that samples are delivered to the laboratory in a timely manner, reducing the risk of sample degradation and contamination as well as turnaround time. As of end of March R4H has incorporated 26 Private clinics in the Sample Transport Program”, added Nazombe.

In conclusion, Shenton Kacheche, Chief Laboratory Scientist from the Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM) emphasized on the importance of maintaining quality of samples, Biosecurity and BioSafety when handling samples. In his statement he indicated that with this system we ensure that quality of specimen is maintained. Those handling samples should follow Standard operating procedures so that they don’t acquire infection and also prevent spread of organisms from community and environment. Since samples contain organisms, they should be protected to prevent intentional exposure.

UPDATE- DROP IN CENTRES (Jan- March)

R4H is implementing the Sample transport program in Drop In Centres which are visited by key populations to access healthcare services.

From January - March, **626** samples were transported from 19 Drop - In - Centres and **533** laboratory results were transported by R4H Sample transport couriers.

KEY FIGURES

Total no. of Districts : 6

Total no. of Drop In Centers : 19

District	No	DIC Name
Lilongwe	1	Area 23
	2	Area 25
	3	Area 36
	4	Likuni
	5	Area 47
Mangochi	6	CEDEP
	7	DHO Boma Pakachere
	8	Monkey Bay Pakachere
Machinga	9	Liwonde DIC
	10	Ntaja
Zomba	11	Matawale
Blantyre	12	Bangwe
	13	Chirimba
	14	Naperi
	15	Nyambadwe
Mzimba North	16	Ekwendeni
	17	Zolozolo
	18	Hill Top
	19	Katoto

HR UPDATES

New employees :

- Oris Omega, *Grants Officer*
- Dr Stella Kasirye, *Interim Country Director*

PROJECT SUCCESSES (January- March)

- o Scale up of Optimized Sample Transport to Mzimba North and Lilongwe districts (trained 290 Health Care Workers (HCW) on USSD in 61 HCFs in Lilongwe and 34 HCFs in Mzimba North, addition of OST Lilongwe and Mzimba North districts/facilities into the optimization database)
- o Participated in the NLIMS CommCare integration stakeholder technical call
- o VillageReach USSD reporting tool changes to autogenerate unique identification code for Polio surveillance cases
- o Transported Polio stool samples within targeted timeframe
- o Hired Optimized Sample Transport (OST) Program Assistant Officer
- o OST review meeting for Rumphi and Mzimba North
- o Inclusion and training of HCWs in new private clinics in Mzimba North and Lilongwe on USSD sample volume reporting
- o Procurement of new 18 android tablets and 8 laptops for CommCare distributed to couriers
- o Attended Q1 OST review meetings for Mzimba north and Rumphi districts
- o Attended Digital Health Technical Working Group meeting at Crossroads Hotel
- o Attended Weekly NLIMS-CommCare integration calls/meeting with UMB and EGPAF
- o UMB sample reception and result dispatch module training with couriers at Bwaila
- o Tec4med TOTs with VillageReach, training of head couriers on polio sample transport SOPs
- o DHMT virtual meeting on STO updates with Lilongwe and Mzimba North DHO
- o Developed Acute Flaccid Paralysis (Polio stool) sample transmittal log and Google sheet transported samples consolidation tool
- o Attended USSD technical changes meeting to autogenerate unique ID for Polio surveillance; demo with Clickmobile and VillageReach
- o Revised the Contract for Polio sample Transport and USSD between R4H and Village Reach
- o Quality Management Systems (QMS); developed 6 ICT SOPs and 1 OST SOP and 2 mandatory SOPs.
- Demo with iMoSyS on the TB e-Health tool, development of an MOU for system development with iMoSyS

MEETINGS ATTENDED AND ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED FROM JAN- MARCH

- o NLIMS CommCare integration pilot visits
- o Routine OST technical support to five (5) districts
- o CommCare improvements
- o VillageReach ST for polio stool samples and USSD service provision
- o QMS- develop SOPs and policies, train staff on SOPs
- o Exploration of new data collection tool for ST
- o Stakeholder engagement on digital integration
- o Staff capacity building (ICT/OST)

DRIVING SCHOOL UPDATE (JAN- MARCH)

- o 2 Trainees from World Vision
- o 2 Kabaza Trainees
- o Refresher training for 15 Trainees

PLANS FOR THE NEXT QUARTER (APRIL- JUNE)

- o 2 Trainees from AHF for Initial riding training
- o 3 trainees for refresher
- o 10 trainees from PIH- refresher
- o 5 trainees from CHAI
- o 1 Trainee from VSO

PICTORIAL FOCUS



R4H Finance team trained all staff on CDC Grant requirements led by Oris Omega, Grants Officer in March 2023.



Hastings Buleya, MEAL Officer presenting Sample Transport report for Nkhatabay and Likoma Districts during ST Program review meeting at Nkhatabay District Health Office (DHO) in March 2023



Dr Thokozani Kalua, Country Director- UMB (R) presenting 2 Motorcycles to R4H as a sub- award between University of Maryland Baltimore (UMB) and R4H. Representing R4H, Angellina Nazombe (L) and Ptrick Sikwese (L) in February 2023.

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