

# THE CATALYST

THE NEWSLETTER FOR PAI DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

## KEEPING SCORE

### Advocates in Liberia use data to maintain essential health care during COVID-19

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Liberia were critical to helping communities respond to the Ebola outbreaks of the previous decade. While there were many lessons learned from the crisis, for Joyce Kilikpo, one stood out.

“There is more power behind collective voices than a single institution,” says the executive director of Public Health Initiative Liberia (PHIL). “I knew that civil society could better prepare for future health crises by working together.”

With a grant from PAI, Kilikpo led the formalization of the Liberia Health CSOs Network (LiHCON) in 2019. Just one year later, the coalition would find itself responding to a new emergency — one that the country’s health system was not prepared for.

While shortages of essential medicines and health supplies, including contraceptives, have long been a problem in Liberia, this issue has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Making matters worse, a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) caused widespread anxiety among providers, and people were hesitant to seek health care for fear of contracting the virus.

“Much of the PPE was left over from Ebola. Items such as latex gloves had grown brittle and could no longer offer protection,” says Kilikpo.

To begin bridging the gap in lifesaving supplies and equipment, LiHCON launched an in-person assessment last June with support from PAI. Members of the coalition used a scorecard to measure the availability of PPE as well as other critical services and supplies at 45 health facilities across five counties.

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“I began getting calls from health centers saying, ‘Joyce, what did you do? We just had PPE supplies delivered!’ That’s when I knew our efforts were having an impact.”

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Martin Harvey/Photodisc via Getty Images

“We were hearing about how these shortages were impacting communities, but anecdotal evidence isn’t enough — there needs to be data to support the claims,” explains Kilikpo.

Because the coalition members already lived and worked in these communities, they were able to gather the information quickly. In just two weeks, the assessment findings were presented to government officials.

Thanks to LiHCON’s scorecard and advocacy efforts, the government fast-tracked plans to get PPE to facilities. As a result, health care workers and patients are less fearful, and the number of people seeking care is closer to pre-COVID levels.

Supplies of commodities, including family planning and medicines used to treat sexually transmitted infections, have also improved, but shortages remain a significant problem.

LiHCON is already making plans for a follow-up assessment to track the continued availability of PPE and medicines. The coalition will also soon begin monitoring COVID-19 donor funding coming into Liberia to ensure these investments are used effectively to maintain essential health services, especially sexual and reproductive health care.

# CEO CORNER

## How we take care of one another



The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many of us to think more deeply about how we treat and take care of each other. Throughout this crisis, people have been showing up for one another in ways that give me hope.

At PAI, we witness this every day.

This special edition of *The Catalyst* highlights six stories of frontline advocates taking care of their communities, working through the chaos of the pandemic to connect people to essential COVID-19 information, services and protective equipment while still defending sexual and reproductive health and rights.

I am in awe of what grantees have accomplished under enormously difficult circumstances, and it is an honor to support these organizations and their work. That they have been able to do this while maintaining the safety and emotional well-being of their staff is a true testament to their dedication and compassion.

I am also proud of how PAI has supported these advocates, offering more flexibility with existing grants, serving as a strategic and technical partner when needed and providing additional funding and guidance for their COVID-19 work.

The specific challenges and strategies may vary, but at the end of the day, it comes down to one simple question from us: What do you need?

For PHIL and members of the LiHCON coalition it leads, what they needed was data to bolster their advocacy efforts and ensure that health facilities in Liberia had PPE and essential medicines.

We trust grantees to know what projects need to be prioritized and enabled PHIL to shift its PAI-funded work so that LiHCON members could assess the availability of critical services and supplies in 45 health facilities across five counties.

Of course, this is all made possible because donors like you have stood by us. Your generosity has been critical during this crisis and enabled us to be agile in our support of on-the-ground advocates during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every time you make a donation, you are showing up for PAI, the advocates we work with and women, youth and vulnerable communities around the world. Thank you for your trust in us. Thank you for being part of this movement.

In solidarity,



Nabeeha Kazi Hutchins  
President and CEO

P.S. In case you haven't heard the news, the award-winning artist Synthia SAINT JAMES is creating an original work of art to kick off a new partnership with PAI! "HER Voice for Empowerment" represents love, justice, health and hope and celebrates 27 communities where most of our funded partners belong. We're excited to share behind-the-scenes sneak peeks with you as well as stories of the advocates and the women and youth in their communities who inspired this painting. Be sure to follow @pai\_org on Instagram and Twitter and @paiwdc on Facebook for more updates!



Photo by Leroy Hamilton

# MEETING THE MOMENT

As grantees pivoted their work in response to the pandemic, PAI quickly adapted our support by offering flexible funding for their COVID-19 activities



## MEXICO

To ensure that Indigenous youth in Chiapas have accurate information on where to access contraceptives and other sexual and reproductive health care, **Observatorio de Mortalidad Materna en México (OMM)** took to the airwaves, reaching 135,000 people via a multilingual radio program. OMM also launched a multimedia campaign, and within six months, 31,000 young people had engaged with Facebook posts and WhatsApp messages. Several youth reached out directly for more information on contraceptives, allowing OMM to refer them to operational clinics.



## CÔTE D'IVOIRE

To monitor how the pandemic is impacting health services in the city of Abidjan, **La Fédération Nationale des Organisations de Santé de Côte d'Ivoire (FENOS-CI)** trained women and young people in multiple districts to collect information on the accessibility, affordability and availability of COVID-19 services, immunizations and reproductive health care, including contraceptives. FENOS-CI used the data gathered to advocate for improved access to higher quality maternal, child and adolescent health services.



Yaw Niel/Shutterstock.com

## MOZAMBIQUE

In Mozambique, nonprofit-supported community health agents are a critical resource for people, providing in-home care for patients with chronic illnesses, limited mobility or those living in remote areas. But when COVID-19 cases began appearing in the country, these agents were forced to cut back on home visits due to strict lockdowns and a lack of protective equipment. As a result of ongoing advocacy efforts by **Observatório Cidadão para Saúde**, community health agents are finally starting to become credentialed, which allows them to travel outside of their neighborhoods during the lockdowns and receive PPE so they can safely provide in-home health care, including family planning and reproductive health services.



## KENYA

To effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments need every available resource — including every health care provider — to keep people safe. Thanks to the successful advocacy efforts of **Living Goods Kenya**, the government now recognizes community health volunteers as essential to COVID-19 response strategies. This recognition has made them eligible to receive PPE and emergency payments so that community health volunteers can continue to provide primary health care, including sexual and reproductive health services, in their communities.



hadynyah/E+ via Getty Images

## NEPAL

Reproductive health needs — including menstrual hygiene management — are often overlooked by government officials and others in power during a crisis. When pandemic-related lockdowns made accessing menstrual products difficult, **Visible Impact** distributed more than 1,700 reusable sanitary pads to women and girls, including those living in shelter homes, carpet factory workers, youth with disabilities and transgender people. In addition, menstrual cups were given to 100 frontline health workers so they could safely manage their menstruation while wearing protective suits for long periods of time.

# GOING BEYOND FUNDING

## PAI's technical assistance supports advocates navigating COVID-19 guidelines

Since the pandemic began last year, PAI grantees have been critical to connecting their communities with COVID-19 information and services. At the same time, these advocates have ensured that women, youth and other vulnerable populations can continue to access sexual and reproductive health care despite strict lockdowns, the suspension of services and widespread misinformation.

As the workloads of these advocates have shifted dramatically to respond to the crisis, so have the ways that PAI supports their efforts.

Key to this response is offering increased flexibility with new and existing grants to facilitate in-country projects related to the pandemic. But beyond this critical funding, how can PAI best use our technical expertise to support these on-the-ground advocates?



Mamunur/Depositphotos.com

In June 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) released interim guidance outlining steps governments should take to ensure continued access to essential

health services during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. While the WHO guidance included a section on reproductive health care, its scope was broad and did not provide detailed information on addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations.

That's where PAI came in. In partnership with other organizations focused on global health and family planning, we applied our subject matter expertise to the WHO guidance and created the "Optimizing the World Health Organization COVID-19 Interim Guidance" report. This advocacy tool was designed to help PAI grantees and other CSOs work with their governments on the implementation of the WHO guidance at the country level and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health care during the pandemic.

The report distilled the WHO guidance into actionable items and included specific recommendations for the continuation of care for adolescents and youth, people with disabilities and refugee populations.

Knowing that there was a critical need for this information in Francophone West Africa, the report was published in French as well as English. The guidelines were shared with PAI grantees directly and made available to other sexual and reproductive health and rights advocates via our website, webinars and foundation partners.

Donors like you ensure that PAI can quickly respond to opportunities like this and give grantees the resources they need to help keep their communities safe. Thank you for supporting this vital work.

To read the "Optimizing the World Health Organization COVID-19 Interim Guidance" report, visit [www.pai.org/resources/optimizing-the-world-health-organization-covid-19-interim-guidance](http://www.pai.org/resources/optimizing-the-world-health-organization-covid-19-interim-guidance).

# PAI'S GLOBAL IMPACT

We believe that lasting change needs to be driven by local experts. That is why we partner with on-the-ground advocates working to protect and expand sexual and reproductive health and rights in their countries during — and beyond — the COVID-19 crisis.



*On average, PAI provided each grantee with \$38,000 in financial support to advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights in their country.*

Bangladesh

Benin

Burkina Faso

Central African Republic

Côte d'Ivoire

Dominican Republic

El Salvador

Ethiopia

Ghana

Guatemala

Guinea

India

Indonesia

Kenya

Liberia

Madagascar

Malawi

Mali

Mauritania

Mexico

Mozambique

Nepal

Niger

Nigeria

North Macedonia

Peru

Senegal

Sierra Leone

Tanzania

Togo

Uganda

Zambia

Zimbabwe

## STAND UP FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Help ensure that women and girls can access the essential sexual and reproductive health care they need and deserve through COVID-19 and beyond. Visit [www.pai.org/donate](http://www.pai.org/donate) and make a gift today.

For more information on ways to support PAI's work, please contact Kate Duis at [kduis@pai.org](mailto:kduis@pai.org) or +1 (202) 557-3454.

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