

GUINEA-BISSAU

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA, WHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

In 2020-2021, the Joint Team sought to improve access to adolescent and youth-friendly HIV, sexual and reproductive health, and family planning services in Guinea-Bissau through the development and evaluation of a model service package. Several behaviour and communication initiatives were implemented reaching thousands of adolescent and young people to raise awareness and promote HIV and COVID-19 prevention and sexual and reproductive health services; and the Joint Team also made meaningful contributions to ensuring the continuity of these services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and paediatric treatment coverage in the country increased due to unwavering commitment of the Government backed by technical and financial support from the Joint Team. Community journalists were trained to produce and broadcast promoting antenatal care, HIV testing, PMTCT, early infant diagnosis, and treatment services. Healthcare providers from selected health facilities were trained to improve their skills of managing HIV, hepatitis C, and other sexual and reproductive infections, including counselling, treatment management, and nutrition support. The Government was supported to develop the national nutrition policy to boost the quality of HIV treatment and nutrition services and inform the overall HIV response. People living with HIV were oriented on healthy meal preparation while nutrition technicians were trained on integrated acute malnutrition management protocol to improve treatment adherence and the health outcomes of people living with HIV. The Joint Team supported the Government to develop and implement an integrated service operationalization plan and the integrated sample transportation plan which helped to increase early infant diagnosis and paediatric antiretroviral treatment coverage.

HIV PREVENTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEY POPULATIONS

The Joint Team provided technical assistance for the development and evaluation of a model service package aimed at increasing access to adolescent and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health, family planning, and HIV services in Guinea-Bissau. The evaluation was conducted under the Bandim Health Project led by the Guinean National Institute of Public Health and as part of the study on knowledge, attitudes and practices among adolescents and young people in the context of sexual and reproductive health and family planning. Results of the evaluation showed that 60% of the adolescents and young people reported that they were comfortable with the package of services while 15% felt uncomfortable. Only 5% stated that they were satisfied with their experience, 40% reported their discontent, and 37% rated it as a

very bad service. The participants also made several recommendations for improvement—27% wanted to see more professionalism and discretion, 17% preferred to be attended by a service provider of the same gender, and 12% asserted that there should be less judgement. The evaluation further revealed that condom use among respondents aged 15-24 year at last casual sexual intercourse was at 46% among boys and 21% for girls.

In partnership with the National Youth Institute, the Joint Team implemented various behavioural communication initiatives on HIV and COVID-19 prevention and sexual and reproductive health in seven regions. A total of 2100 sessions were conducted in 258 communities sensitizing 9197 people while peer-led activities benefited around 100 people from these communities.

PMTCT, EARLY INFANT DIAGNOSIS, AND PAEDIATRIC TREATMENT

To address the low coverage of prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and paediatric treatment services in Guinea-Bissau, the Joint Team provided substantial technical and financial assistance to national partners to improve access to these services. As a result, PMTCT coverage increased slightly in 2021—from 30.5% in 2020 to 44.6% in 2021. The related fully costed and validated plan also expanded access to paediatric treatment among children living with HIV immediately after diagnosis, increasing treatment coverage among eligible children living with HIV from 14% in 2019 to 37.2% by September 2021. The number of sites providing paediatric treatment services also increased by 25 to bring the total number of sites to 100 in 2021.

Training and financial assistance was provided for 30 community journalists to produce and broadcast radio spots promoting antenatal care, HIV testing and early infant diagnosis (EID), PMTCT services, paediatric treatment, and HIV testing in nutritional rehabilitation centres and boost uptake of these services among communities. Additionally, 4579 pregnant women enrolled in antenatal care were sensitized on COVID-19 prevention through Joint Team-supported community outreach activities.

HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT

In partnership with the National Network of People Living with HIV (RENAP+), the Joint Team implemented several community-based peer counselling activities. A total of 812 people living with HIV who were lost to follow up were traced through routine and outreach initiatives and enrolled back on antiretroviral treatment—reaching 77% of the target. Meanwhile, 29 039 people were sensitized on prevention of COVID-19 and HIV; and 132 HIV-exposed children were referred for early infant diagnosis (EID).

The Joint Team in collaboration with the National Programme on STI, HIV/AIDS and Viral Hepatitis (PNLS/HV) conducted a capacity building session on clinical management of people living with HIV for 46 healthcare providers (27 females) from 29 health facilities with the largest number of clients affected with the three diseases. The training covered pre- and post-HIV test counselling, nutritional support, therapeutic education, management of side effects of antiretroviral treatment, and clinical and laboratory follow-up of people living with HIV enrolled on treatment, including regular viral load monitoring.

The Joint Team provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Public Health for the development of a national nutritional policy to improve the nutritional and food security and treatment adherence among people living with HIV. In 2020, the Joint Team in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and the nongovernmental organization ALTERNAG, trained 81 members of RENAP+ to enhance their knowledge around the preparation of wholesome meals using locally produced nutritious food in their respective communities. In addition, some 47 health technicians from nutritional recovery centres and treatment sites were trained on the integrated acute malnutrition management protocol to facilitate case referral and support integration of HIV services in nutritional recovery centres in Bafata, Gabu, and Oio regions.

HIV AND HEALTH SERVICES INTEGRATION

The Joint Team supported the Government for the development of a budgeted service integration operationalization plan for 2021-2025. The plan aims to offer integrated services for all clients, particularly women, adolescents, and young people who come to healthcare facilities for individual services. The integrated services include sexual and reproductive health, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis, malaria, nutrition, immunization, and community health.

In 2021, the Joint Team and Global Fund partnered in implementing the Integrated National Sample Transportation Plan to ensure minimum coverage of diagnostic services in all regions using GeneXpert technology in Points-of-Care. Additionally, 138 health workers were trained on the new HIV and maternal and child health integration Standard Operating procedures to improve the quality of services. Six new diagnostic sites were opened following the training of 15 laboratory technicians on GeneXpert technologies and procurement of 13 700 test kits, including dried blood spot (DBS), Xpert HIV-1 for viral load, and Qual EID cartridge kit/10.

DATA MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY

The Joint Team supported the Government to improve the availability of quality HIV data for programme planning and results-based management of the national HIV response. This included the development and installation of a HIV data monitoring, management, and evaluation system; and the digitalization of client records and reports which were linked to the National Health Information System through the District Health Information System 2 (DHIS2).

The National Programme on STI, HIV/AIDS and Viral Hepatitis was supported to reproduce and distribute over 74 000 information, guidance, and data collection documents to support treatment and care services among people living with HIV in Guinea-Bissau. The Joint Team also supported the development and production of various documents to strengthen viral load services, including the production and distribution of 50 000 viral load request forms; 5000 EID request forms; and 3000 viral load and EID sample transportation request forms to healthcare facilities.

To ensure system strengthening and continuity of services, the Joint Team provided continuous technical and financial support to the Ministry of Public Health and the High Commission for the COVID-19 response to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including resource mobilization; case management; infection prevention and control; risk communication and community engagement; laboratory; surveillance; logistics and supply, and continuity of essential health services.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

Over the reporting period, the Joint Team supported the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2022-2026, where joint programming on HIV was placed under Outcome 3: *“By 2026, the population of Guinea-Bissau, especially the most vulnerable, will have greater and equitable access to and use of essential quality social services, including in emergencies”*.

Actively supporting the realization of the 2030 Agenda in Guinea-Bissau, the Joint Team is facilitating the engagement of affected people and communities in all development processes, under the principle of leaving no one behind. For instance, ADPP Guinea-Bissau, a nongovernmental organization that works to improve the health, education, socio-economic conditions of most vulnerable populations, was supported to conduct four community meetings aimed at addressing the sociocultural barriers to men’s participation in HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria responses. A total of 150 opinion, religious, and traditional leaders (24% females) participated from Bafata, Bissau, Buba, Gabu, and Quebu cities. Alongside others, this initiative supported the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduced inequalities) and 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions posed significant challenges in the coordination and implementation of HIV programmes. Delays in Government decision-making also continued to affect implementation of planned activities in 2020-2021.

Social and cultural barriers remain major challenges in the scale up of HIV, STIs, sexual and reproductive health, and family planning services. Besides, increased misinformation on efficacy and side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine among some communities refrained people from taking the vaccine to protect themselves and others from the infection. While early diagnosis of HIV-exposed children and coverage of paediatric treatment increased in the last three years, there is a need to identify key bottlenecks around EID among babies aged 0-2 months. As of November 2021, only 21.2% infants within 2 months of age were tested for HIV, well below the national 90% target. Poor HIV commodities stock management and weak data collection and management systems hinder the national capacity to rollout informed and sustainable HIV programmes.

There is a crucial need to increase and diversify the domestic and external resources for the HIV response in Guinea-Bissau to meet national targets and goals set in the Global AIDS Strategy. Experience showed the need to also build national capacity to ensure successful implementation of programmes supported through the Global Fund grants for the 2021-2023 period.

Report available on the
UNAIDS Results and Transparency Portal

open.unaids.org