

Call for Proposals:

Analysis of COVID-19 response networks in Africa

Open to

Consortia consisting of at least one Africa-based national public health institute and one Germany-based academic institution

Funded by

**The Evidence-Based Public Health Unit (ZIG2),
The Centre for International Health Protection (ZIG),
The Robert Koch Institute (RKI)**

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1. BACKGROUND

The Evidence-Based Public Health unit (ZIG2) of the Centre for International Health Protection (ZIG) of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) generates evidence around urgent and relevant public health questions. It does so in a number of ways, including program evaluation, implementation, operational, exploratory and explanatory research. Among other activities, ZIG2 allocates funds for the execution of research to address relevant public health problems. Due to limitations in human resources, at times, ZIG2 assigns some of these funds to qualified institutions based on a competitive call for proposals for the execution of specific research activities.

This call for proposals invites the submission of research proposals to analyze COVID-19 response networks in Africa.

COVID-19 provides an unprecedented example of a public health emergency. The actions that are required to deliver an effective COVID-19 response pose extraordinary challenges to any country affected by the pandemic, and these challenges are even bigger for low and middle income countries which – even under normal circumstances – are restricted by limited resources and capacities. Yet, COVID-19 is by far not the first or only outbreak that is affecting low and middle income countries, including Africa. In fact, in 2018 alone, 96 new disease outbreaks, including those related to cholera, measles and yellow fever, were reported across 36 member states of the WHO African region. It can thus be assumed that African countries have considerable experience and expertise in the speedy mobilization and effective collaboration of actors in public health emergencies, and in implementing pandemic responses under challenging circumstances and with limited resources. Countries from the global north, including Germany, can learn from this experience for future pandemics.

A public health emergency requires a coherent response by actors from a variety of sectors. An effective pandemic emergency response unfolds in multiple steps including the identification and isolation of new cases, the establishment of diagnostic procedures, monitoring and reporting systems, the preparation and equipment of health care facilities, the communication of risks to the public, the development and implementation of laws and policies, and the rapid generation of evidence which will feed into political decision-making and clinical practice. To complete and align these steps in a coherent and effective manner, various stakeholders can be mobilized and work hand in hand. Networks of government representatives, academics, health professionals, representatives of non-governmental organizations, employers, the public, and other stakeholders can collaborate and coordinate actions to contain public health outbreaks and limit the spread of a disease. It can thus be hypothesized that effective national emergency responses to COVID-19 rest on effective networks of organizational actors that are quickly mobilized or formed in the context of an emergency.

Previous research has shown that social network analysis is a suitable methodology to analyze, visualize, monitor and understand inter-sectoral collaboration. Social network analysis can help to map the composition of a network, analyze network structure, and investigate the collaboration between network actors. A social network analysis of COVID-19 response networks could thus, for example, provide valuable information about: the actors involved in response networks and their respective roles as well as reasons for collaboration, the structure of the response networks, the quality and modes of

collaboration, leadership and coordination of the response, as well as about facilitators and barriers of collaboration and network-building. Social network analysis can also investigate the evolution of networks over time and space. It can further provide indicators of successful collaboration and identify factors which led to the delivery of effective interventions as well as highlight which factors impeded effectiveness.

Apart from single narrative accounts, little evidence exists about how stakeholders collaborated in order to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in their respective countries or regions, particularly in Africa. Yet, the current situation presents a unique opportunity to build empirical evidence about effective organizational networks in public health emergencies. Understanding the structure, content, working and effects of COVID-19 response networks in countries across Africa would provide valuable evidence that could inform future pandemic responses in countries around the globe.

2. OBJECTIVES

This call for proposals is aimed at research projects which employ social network analysis to gain a better understanding of how stakeholders collaborated across sectors to manage and reduce the impact of COVID-19 in African countries. In the context of this call, response networks are defined as a group of organizations from various sectors that were interconnected in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. These might include governmental institutions, academic institutions, civil society organizations, companies, health care facilities, educational facilities, etc.

The aim of this call for proposals is to build the evidence on the collaboration of different stakeholders in emergency responses. The call's objective is to provide those involved in pandemic responses with an understanding of the structure, workings and role of organizational networks in public health emergencies, and with evidence on the drivers and barriers to successful inter-sectoral collaboration.

3. BUDGET

The budget for one research project should not exceed 50.000€.

The following items can be included in the budget:

- Personnel costs for project staff based at one of the consortium partner institutions;
- Costs for field work (e.g. survey development, recruitment, data collection, data analysis, etc.);
- Consumables;
- Travel costs;
- Costs for the dissemination of results (e.g. publication fees, dissemination workshop,...);
- Other costs (e.g. costs for consultancies, if their appropriateness is outlined in detail,...).

4. FORMAL ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Applicants by a consortium consisting of at least 1) a) one Africa-based national public health institute/agency, or 1) b) one Africa-based academic institution supported by a national public health institute/agency, and 2) at least one Germany-based research institution are allowed to submit applications. The consortium can consist of a maximum of four institutions in total.

The proposed project can start on 1 September 2020 at the earliest and has to be completed by 31 December 2020. The applicants are responsible for obtaining ethical approval from their respective country.

The application has to clearly outline which institutions will be responsible for which tasks. The budget for each institution must also be outlined in detail. Upon decision for funding, funds will be released to the principal investigator's institution. This could be an Africa-based or a Germany-based partner.

Applicants can contact Sameh Al-Awlaqi (Al-AwlaqiS@rki.de) in case of questions.

Applications must be submitted to Sameh Al-Awlaqi (Al-AwlaqiS@rki.de), using the application form annexed to this call. The application must not exceed 10 pages, including references and excluding annexes. Applications that do not follow the outline of the application form or exceed the page limit will not be considered. A CV for each applicant (maximum 3 pages) should be submitted alongside the application.

Applications should be submitted in English.

5. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Projects are eligible if they:

- Are jointly submitted by a consortium consisting of at least one Africa-based national public health institute/agency and one Germany-based research institution;
- Are completed by 31 January 2021 with all costs incurred by 31 December 2020.

6. SELECTION CRITERIA

The submitted projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Significance: Does the research proposal build on current evidence? Does it address an important research gap? Do the objectives provide a good fit with the gaps identified?
- Methodological rigor: Is the research design and the methodology outlined appropriate to address the objectives? Is the research design feasible? Does the methodology follow the state-of-the-art? Have the applicants considered means to address any potential shortcomings of the research design?

- Applicants' expertise: Does the applicant have the appropriate and necessary expertise in the topic to successfully complete the project?
- Feasibility: Is the project feasible? Can it be completed within the outlined time frame? Are all risks considered and appropriate mitigation strategies developed? Are ethical and legal implications considered?
- Budget: Is the budget appropriate and proportionate?
- Impact: Are the dissemination strategies appropriate? Is the project likely to have an impact on policy and practice and is it likely to advance public health emergency responses?

7. PROCEDURE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals are to be submitted by

August 05, 2020, 17:00 (Berlin time).

Proposals have to be submitted to Sameh Al-Awlaqi by email at Al-AwlaqiS@rki.de, using the application form annexed to this call.

8. REVIEW PROCESS

Once an application is submitted, the applicant who submitted the proposal will receive a confirmation email.

All proposals received will be screened for completeness and for meeting the formal criteria outlined above. Only complete proposals which fulfil these criteria will be evaluated for funding eligibility.

Complete proposals will be reviewed internally by RKI staff. All complete proposals will be scored based on the above selection criteria. The final decision about the proposals that will be funded will be made by the RKI.

9. CONTACT

Please contact Sameh Al-Awlaqi, Research Manager at the RKI, at Al-AwlaqiS@rki.de in case of questions.