WHO and Ministry of Health personnel check for IDSR priority conditions during a joint support supervision visit to a health centre in Beledweyne district, Hirshabelle state, Somalia. Photo credit: WHO/WHO Somalia11 June 2024, Somalia – Amid the complex humanitarian emergency that is ongoing in Somalia, the population is highly vulnerable to disease outbreaks. In such a situation, early detection of disease outbreaks is crucial for an appropriate public health response and interventions.

Somalia has been successfully strengthening its multi-disease surveillance system by implementing the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) system. These efforts have been made in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the WHO Country Office in Somalia.

IDSR improves the efficiency and effectiveness of health information systems. IDSR data are hosted on DHIS2, the open-source software platform used nationally to collate district health information. Health workers use this platform to record, in one place, real-time information on health events and analyse data for early detection and prompt response to disease outbreaks.

## IDSR system implementation

“IDSR has enabled the Ministry of Health and Human Services to stay ahead of the public health events and safeguard the health of our communities by detecting outbreaks early,” said Dr Sahro Isse Mohamed, Head of the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response Unit, Ministry of Health and Human Services, Federal Government of Somalia.

WHO Somalia supported the development of a 3-year, multiphase operational plan. This includes technical guidelines for IDSR implementation, standard operating procedures, and training material tailored to the surveillance needs of health workers.

As of January 2024, the country has been implementing the second phase of the plan, which aims to:

improve the quality of data that health workers report to the IDSR system

link surveillance data with laboratory information

strengthen the capacity for data use at the subnational level

monitor and evaluate the implementation of the IDSR system through supportive supervision

monitor indicators

conduct review meetings with all stakeholders.

## Transforming plans into actions

Planning for IDSR began in 2020, when Somalia made a strategic decision to implement such a system. In 2021, the country established a functioning IDSR system for the first time. In 2022, guidelines and training materials were developed to build health workers' capacities to successfully use and implement the IDSR system. All these efforts have contributed to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with disease outbreaks.

The final phase of the operational plan will complete in 2024. The IDSR system will then provide a holistic approach to public surveillance of priority diseases and conditions, as well as address response needs.

Somalia has also initiated steps to implement event-based surveillance, especially at the community level, to complement the IDSR system. The country is also strengthening its public health laboratory capacity to ensure that priority diseases reported through the IDSR system are diagnosed in good time.

Rapid response teams will be trained to respond to emergencies within the community. There are also plans to establish surveillance and response systems for antimicrobial resistance, and maternal and perinatal deaths.

WHO is committed to support Somalia as it continues to develop and refine its IDSR system. This support is vital for strengthening Somalia’s surveillance system to improve the country’s preparedness and response plan to disease outbreaks.

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