



Ministry of Health and Social Services, the Embassy of Japan and the World Health Organization (WHO) renew effort to address the Hepatitis E Virus Outbreak in Namibia

Windhoek, Thursday, August 13, 2020 — The Namibian government renewed its efforts in containing the Hepatitis E Virus (HEV), which was declared as an outbreak since 14 December 2017. To this end, the “Improving the national preparedness and response capacity to contain infectious disease outbreaks and other drought related public health events in Namibia” project worth close to four million Namibian dollars was launched by the Embassy of Japan, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS) at a ceremony held at the Namibian COVID-19 Communication Centre.

The project will be implemented in the Khomas, Erongo, Omusati, Ohangwena, Kavango East and Kavango West regions by WHO in partnership with MoHSS for a duration of 12 months.

Furthermore, the funding will strengthen the national and regional capacity, which are essential components required to implement effective response intervention (ERI). ERI is central when containing infectious diseases particularly, with the ongoing HEV.

As of 28 June 2020, over seven-thousand (7,000) HEV cases have been reported, with the majority still from informal settlements in Windhoek (62%) and Swakopmund (21%). Sixty-five (65) deaths were reported, of which twenty - six (26) are maternal deaths.

In accepting the gesture, Minister of Health and Social Services, Dr Kalumbi Shangula, described the project as having a “spin-off” effect for the COVID-19 response. Dr Shangula further stated that over the past three years, MoHSS has been fronting and dealing with various disease outbreaks, making reference to the ongoing COVID-19 alongside HEV, as well as Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever and Anthrax.

Dr Shangula said: “When we are faced with a pandemic of this magnitude, the workforce, financial, infrastructure and other resources can feel the strain and previous gains can easily be lost in the process”.

The support will also go towards addressing drought-related health events, including severe acute malnutrition in response to the protracted drought of 2018-2019. Records from MoHSS reveal that for a period of eleven months, from April 2018 to March 2019, 50% and 11% of the total children weighed were moderately and severely malnourished respectively. Moreover, of the total two - thousand - eight - hundred and sixty (2, 860) children admitted at health facilities due to severe acute malnutrition, two - hundred and eight - six (286), which is equivalent to 10% have died during the same period.

Also speaking at the same occasion, Namibia’s WHO Representative, Dr Charles Sagoe-Moses, emphasized the need to sustain investment in essential health services while attending to the urgency of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Dr Sagoe-Moses mentioned that the project provides an opportunity to intensify efforts towards the HEV outbreak.

Specifically the project will:

1. Improve advocacy and well-coordinated response to contain infectious disease outbreaks and severe acute malnutrition at national and targeted regions.

2. Strengthen surveillance and early warning, as well as response systems whereby nurses, doctors and community health workers are able to timely detect, report, and submit weekly reports or data, from targeted districts to national level.
3. Appropriate disease control interventions introduced at all levels to prevent, promptly initiate treatment, or refer to the next levels.
4. Strengthen social mobilisation and risk communication at all levels for disease prevention and health promotion.
5. Improve cross-border collaboration along the common border between Namibia and Angola, to reduce morbidity and mortality.

In his speech, Ambassador of Japan to Namibia, His Excellency Hideaki Harada, explained that Japan plays a proactive role in international cooperation within in the global community. Hence, Japan's support to Namibia's development policies such as Vision 2030, National Development Plan 5 and the Harambee Prosperity Plan aims to contribute to economic and social development together with improving welfare in the country.

Ambassador Harada stated that “the government of Japan decided this time to support the Namibian government's leadership and efforts in partnership with WHO, as a trusted partner of Namibia and Japan in health, in order to ensure that all the members of the community can live a fulfilling life, through strengthening the health system”.

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