

COVID-19 Action Fund for Africa (CAF-Africa)

Providing Community Health Workers (CHWs) in Mali and other Sub-Saharan African Countries with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during COVID-19



Introduction

Community Health Workers (CHWs) act as a critical link between primary healthcare services and members of their community. Across different contexts, they deliver a range of services that include promoting healthy behaviors and connecting community members with providers at formal healthcare facilities (Pallas et al., 2013). Despite the important role that these workers play in their communities, they often lack the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed to protect themselves and deliver services during COVID-19. In Mali for example, there was a need for roughly 9.1 million units of PPE at the beginning of the pandemic, which made it challenging for CHWs to carry out home visits as they were viewed as potential vectors for the virus (Remoe, 2021). In response to this problem, the [**COVID-19 Action Fund for Africa \(CAF-Africa\)**](#) began working with [**Mali's Ministry of Health**](#) and [**Muso**](#) to provide CHWs with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) with which to protect themselves and limit the spread of COVID-19.



Overview of COVID-19 Action Fund for Africa

The COVID-19 Action Fund for Africa (CAF-Africa) is an action-oriented collaborative that consists of over thirty organizations dedicated to protecting CHWs on the frontlines of Africa's COVID-19 response. Its goal is to raise up to \$100 million to supply PPE to CHWs in 24 African countries for approximately one year by matching donated PPE with government identified gaps and conducting end-use verification with in-country partners to document the arrival and distribution of these supplies on the ground.¹ Funding for this initiative primarily comes from philanthropic and private donations (CAF-Africa, 2021).

CAF-Africa works with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and one supporting non-governmental health partner, to determine the PPE needs of CHWs on the ground and establish a plan for distributing these items to workers. The Fund prioritizes the supply of PPE items that have been identified as critical by WHO and UNICEF, such as surgical masks, gloves, face shields, gowns, and containers for biohazard waste. The PPE is sourced from vetted international sources and CAF-Africa aims to provide countries with at least six months' worth of supplies. The following process is used to provide countries with PPE:

- **Kick off call:** All partners (e.g., MOH, Muso) convene and initiate the process of providing PPE to CHWs.
- **Request verification:** In-country partners including the MOH agree on how much PPE is needed to protect CHWs for the next six months.
- **Confirmation of last mile distribution²:** In-country partners agree on the plan for last mile distribution and identify any additional resources that may be required to facilitate this process.
- **Calibration of needs against available CAF-Africa resources:** CAF-Africa confirms that the country's request is feasible given current resources and guiding principles.
- **Order submission:** CAF-Africa submits a consignment form to the MOH to trigger a PPE order.
- **End user verification:** CAF-Africa oversees the shipment of products to the port of entry and the last mile (CAF-Africa, 2021).

Between August 2020 and June 2021, CAF-Africa delivered 81.6 million units of PPE to CHWs in 18 out of the 24 countries (CAF-Africa, 2021; Slobig, 2021).

Enablers and Barriers to Implementation

Overall, Mali's experience with CAF-Africa has been overwhelmingly positive, with Muso officials noting that the PPE items received have enabled CHWs to protect themselves while

¹ The 24 countries are Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d' Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe. These countries were selected because they had: 1) publicly available information on the number of active CHWs in the country, and 2) a civil society partner who was willing to liaise with the Ministry of Health to deliver PPE to CHWs

² Last mile distribution is defined as the distribution of PPE to the final delivery destination

continuing to provide services to young children and their families. Additionally, Muso officials who collaborated with CAF-Africa were impressed with the speed with which PPE arrived in-country, especially at the height of the pandemic. They also noted that their engagement and coordination with CAF-Africa throughout the PPE procurement process was seamless and that they had regular check-ins with the MOH and CAF-Africa to ensure that PPE was delivered and distributed to CHWs.

Despite these successes, in-country officials initially faced difficulties quantifying the PPE needs of CHWs, which required them to revisit their list of needs multiple times to ensure that it was aligned with CAF-Africa's available resources. Additionally, changes to the distribution plan by the MOH sometimes created delays in distributing PPE to CHWs. Lastly, due to global shortages, the quantities of PPE received in Mali were sometimes below what the MOH had requested. Despite these challenges, as of March 2021, CAF-Africa had delivered (or committed to deliver) approximately 7.2 million PPE items to CHWs in Mali (CAF-Africa, 2021).

CAF-Africa's Impact

CAF-Africa's extensive efforts to provide PPE to CHWs are filling an important gap that has plagued CHWs since the onset of COVID-19. By providing these workers with the resources with which to protect themselves against the virus, CAF-Africa is ensuring that they can continue providing essential services to young children and their families while limiting the spread of the virus in their communities. In the future, Mali could use its experience with CAF-Africa as a basis for equipping CHWs with PPE beyond COVID-19. Its experience with CAF-Africa could also serve as a useful resource for other countries interested in exploring different ways of providing PPE to members of their workforce.

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