



## ECOWAS PROVIDES SUPPORT TO MEMBER STATES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

1. ECOWAS Commission stands in solidarity with our Member States affected by the ravaging Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic. We remain committed to the well-being of all citizens and residents in our region. We will continue to support our Member States in their concerted efforts to manage the current health challenge facing the region.
2. As part of our responsibility to our Member States, ECOWAS Commission and its Specialized Institution on health issues – the West African Health Organization (WAHO), have been very active in ensuring that the region is epidemic-free. Specifically, on the issue of Covid-19 which China reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on 5 January 2020, WAHO has been sensitizing the Member States and collaborating with them and partners especially WHO on the strategy and action plan to prevent and contain the pandemic in our region.
3. To enhance the Region preparedness and response to address pandemics, several actions have been taken:
  - The Regional Strategic Plan for Preparedness and Response to Epidemics **was developed and adopted** by the ECOWAS Assembly of Health Ministers.
  - The Strategic Plan for Inter Institutional Communication and manual procedures **have been developed and approved** by the Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS.
  - 15 ECOWAS countries have set up their National Public Health Institute (National Coordination Institution) that **have been evaluated with regular support from WAHO to strengthen their capacities**. A weekly communication process was established.
  - Regional reference laboratories **have been identified and adopted**, and **networked** to cover the needs of the region in biological diagnostics.
4. Let me provide information on some of the activities ECOWAS has implemented through WAHO, with respect to the fight against Covid-19:
  - On Monday 13 January 2020, WAHO published and distributed a weekly Epidemiological Bulletin on major epidemic information including Covid-19 outbreak to all Member States' Ministries of Health and Directors of National Public Health Institutes (NPHIs), and to Partners.



- On the same day, WAHO started weekly online meetings with Directors of Member States' NPHIs and Directors of National Laboratory Service to update them on the Covid-19 situation, challenges and country needs. In addition, WAHO activated all the various existing communication platforms of the various WAHO networks including National Public Health Institutes, Reference Laboratories, ECOWAS Regional Rapid response Team for active communication and collaboration in real-time including information sharing and strategizing.
- In February 2020, several activities relating to Covid-19, were implemented. These included **training of laboratory practitioners** on diagnostic processes, and an Emergency Meeting of ECOWAS Health Ministers to agree on regional approach with strategic decisions on what Member States should do and what should be done regionally. At the end of the training of the laboratory practitioners, each country was given 100 test kits except Nigeria which was given 200 test kits.

5. Unfortunately, our region recorded its first confirmed case of Covid-19 in Nigeria on 28 February 2020. Same day, WAHO with closed collaboration with ECOWAS Commission, issued a Statement on the first case collated individual Member State's priorities.

WAHO also finalized a Regional Strategic Plan (RSP) with an indicative cost of fifty one million dollars (US\$51 million). ECOWAS Commission and WAHO have been sensitizing partners to mobilize resources.

- Since the beginning of March 2020, even before WHO declared Covid-19 as a pandemic on 11 March, WAHO has been coordinating intensively all necessary activities to contain the spread of the virus. On 5 March, WAHO organized a simulation exercise in Abuja to strengthen regional preparedness and response capacities to Covid-19 Epidemic. There were rehearsals and drills for deploying ECOWAS Regional Rapid Response Teams to Member States if required.
- On 15 March, ECOWAS Commission through WAHO accelerated the procurement process of support to Member States in terms of provision of critically needed supplies such as diagnostic kits, viral transport media and personal protective equipment (PPEs). The Commission provided additional fund to procure on an emergency basis 50 thousands test kits and other critically needed equipment to be distributed to member states.
- On 16 March, there was a meeting of Reference Laboratories Technical Working Group for Coronavirus outbreak response within the African Taskforce for Covid-19. The Working Group is a coordination partnership platform with Africa Centre for Disease Control (Africa-CDC) specifically for supporting laboratory testing and supply chains in Member States.

6. The above is a chronology of some of the activities to date implemented by ECOWAS Commission through WAHO in our efforts to support all Member States in their efforts to prevent and contain the spread of Covid-19 within their territories. In order to ensure effective containment of the virus in our region, I wish to appeal to the



national authorities of our Member States on some key issues:

- First, while we appreciate the closure of borders to international flights, special waivers should be granted to flights bringing critically needed supplies and inputs such as diagnostic kits, viral transport media, personal protective equipment and medical personnel. Strict surveillance (entry & exit) should be implemented at all borders, especially land now that flights are being rightly restricted from high burden countries.
- Second, strict isolation (quarantine) of confirmed cases should be implemented. Member States should explore the use of alternative facilities to receive high number of patients.
- Third, the need to reinforce advice to public on personal responsibility regarding social distancing, hand washing and other sanitary hygiene.
- Fourth, Member States are advised to keep their NPHIs (National Public Health Institutions) central in their response efforts.

7. Let me seize this opportunity to assure all our Member States that ECOWAS remains committed to the early resolution of the current health crisis ravaging our region, the African continent and the world. We shall continue to support them to deploy all preventive and containment measures to win the war against the pandemic.

Long live ECOWAS! Long live all ECOWAS Member States!

H.E. Jean-Claude Kassi BROU  
President, ECOWAS Commission  
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