



REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
GOVERNANCE COMMISSION

PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19:

Implications for Future Pandemic Outbreaks in Liberia

April 27, 2020

Introduction

The Governance Commission (GC) is the Government of Liberia's premier policy think-tank clothed with the mandate to promote good governance by advising, designing and formulating appropriate policies, institutional arrangements and frameworks required for achieving good governance in the Republic of Liberia. The GC is also the pillar champion for pillar four (*Governance and Transparency*) of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (*PAPD*) which comprises of two sectors – *Building a More Capable State*, and *Reducing Corruption*. This policy instrument directly supports Pillar One which addresses access to essential health care. The GC has therefore decided to adopt a widely accepted governance model to proffer this policy advice to the government of Liberia in the fight against COVID-19. This model focuses on five key elements which include: 1. Effectiveness & Efficiency 2. Transparency & Accountability 3. Participation 4. Equity and 5. The Rule of Law. Additionally, this policy instrument takes into account the issue of *responsiveness* which aims at strengthening coordination amongst key actors combating the virus. The issue of *sustainability* is also considered to enable the government effectively respond to post COVID-19 public healthcare delivery challenges.

Liberia's fragile healthcare system, coupled with high levels of poverty, urban density, and overcrowded informal settlements represent a multitude of risk

factors that threaten to increase the spread of COVID-19 in the country. These challenges have compelled Liberia to follow the global trend of imposing lockdowns to curtail the spread of the virus.

Background

On April 10, 2020, His Excellency, George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia announced COVID-19 as a National Emergency and set up a National COVID-19 Task Force to coordinate all interventions for containing and eliminating this fast spreading pandemic. As part of the procedures set up, the Government of Liberia established the COVID-19 Trust Fund and opened an Account at the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) to pull all financial resources from the Government of Liberia (GoL), corporate and development partners, as well as ordinary citizens and friends to effectively combat the virus. The Government also set up a website: www.liberiacovid19trustfund.com where Liberians, friends of Liberia, multilateral and bilateral partners and others interested in partnering with the GoL to contain and eradicate the COVID-19 Virus could make contributions.

A National State of Emergency, in line with Articles 85 through 88 of the Liberian Constitution has been declared by the President as part of measures to reinforce the public's adherence to health protocols in order to limit the spread of the virus; ordering the public to stay away from congested areas and observe a partial lockdown to tackle the pandemic which has affected the entire world. The State of Emergency which was modified supported and endorsed by the Legislature in line with the Constitution, will remain in force for sixty days. The partial lockdown within the State of Emergency has entered its second 14-day period. The COVID-19 Taskforce seems to be proceeding well with Liberians abiding by health protocols to mitigate risks associated with the spread. All of this is being achieved in collaboration with the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL). The NPHIL in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH) continues to strengthen existing infection prevention and control efforts,

laboratories, surveillance, infectious disease control, public health capacity building, response to outbreaks, and monitoring of diseases with epidemic or pandemic potential.

As confirmed cases of the virus continue to increase in the country, it is important to fight this pandemic in a collaborative form with a well-defined, effective and efficient common national strategy. Using the governance model therefore, the Governance Commission is pleased to proffer the following policy advice to the GoL with the aim to strengthen government's fight against this and other future pandemics.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

Proper coordination of activities and information sharing among public institutions and the entire population is essential for the effective and efficient use of resources. In view of this, the COVID-19 Response Task Force should:

1. constitute a "capacity management" Team to focus particularly on the establishment and empowerment of the Sub-county COVID-19 Response Task Forces. Such capacity management emphasis should border mainly on providing technical skills and knowledge in handling personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-19 related sick persons and dead bodies;
2. assign contact tracers to all health centers and provide them with relevant communication skills/techniques and equipment to efficiently identify suspected contacts.
3. institute measures to ensure that ambulances are readily available to collect suspected and confirmed cases and to quarantine immediate contacts of suspected victims.

Transparency and Accountability

1. That the all integrity institutions in Liberia such as the *General Auditing Commission, Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, Public Procurement and Commissions Commission, the Internal Audit Agency, etc.*, be included on the COVID-19 Presidential Taskforce as observers for the purpose of attaining firsthand insight on the work of the Taskforce. This will enhance their roles in establishing post-COVID-19 transparency and accountability status.
2. Establish a COVID-19 *Pandemic Assets Storage Facility* to be managed by NPHIL in concert with the Ministry of Health and the General Services Agency. This is meant to avoid the scenario where Ebola assets were mismanaged during that crisis. For example, Ebola PPEs were used as raingears by bike riders, marketers, and other members of the public. Some of the pickup-trucks donated by GoL partners were also seen with individuals (markings visibly removed) who used them as personal vehicles. Some of these vehicles allegedly made their way across the borders with neighboring countries.

Participation

The people of Liberia desire greater participation in the fight against COVID-19 in order to take greater responsibility for their lives and eradicate the virus from their communities. In this regard, the government should:

1. constitute Sub-county COVID-19 Response Task Forces to include Chiefdoms, Clans, General Towns, etc., supported by the MoH (County Health Team), LNPHIL, and partners. The Sub-county Task Force should be required to ensure equal access to participation of both women and men in the fight against COVID-19;

2. The NPHIL and MoH should formalize and document self-organizing initiatives such as hand-washing stations at main entrances of communities around the country, with the goal of making that an established framework for combating pandemics at the community level in the future. Just as there are formal community structures effectively operating without compensation, so will these “self-organizing initiatives” operate without compensation. Additionally, this will serve as a standby mechanism that can be quickly activated once there is an outbreak of any virus/pandemic.

Equity

The equal treatment of all victims or suspected victims of the virus, irrespective of their social status, is pivotal to the successful eradication of the pandemic from Liberia. Consistent with the equity criterion of the governance model, the:

- NPHIL and the MoH are encouraged to continue the mapping of cases and equal treatment of all COVID-19 victims irrespective of status. The alleged practice of calling the names of individuals, especially some officials of government, while withholding the names of other victims of the virus at the community level, sends a mixed signal which has the propensity to further complicate the efforts aimed at eradicating the pandemic. Additionally, there is the need to treat equally other healthcare issues at all healthcare centers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rule of Law

The adherence to the rule of law is a very critical element of good governance. The government of Liberia should therefore:

1. empower law enforcement entities to maintain law and order by demanding compliance from public officials and the general public alike to all health protocols instituted by health authorities during outbreaks;

2. provide special trainings/awareness (tailored to these kinds of situations) to security agencies involved in the fight against COVID-19, such awareness should include understanding their obligations under the law during the discharge of their duties;
3. instantly sanction any law enforcement officer twho will come in conflict with the law during the discharge of their duties. This will build public confidence in government's demand for adherence to the rule of law. The MoJ is encouraged to establish hotlines for members of the public who may want to report security agents seen contravening the law;
4. because the state does not cease to function in the face of this and any other viral outbreak, all public law enforcement outfits such as Police depots, the courts, and prisons should remain effectively functional while adapting themselves to the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be done based on approaches most feasible for the uninterrupted discharge of their duties;
5. strengthen the adherence to the rule of law in rural communities by encouraging citizens' collaboration and cooperation with the fewer number of police officers assigned in those areas.

Responsiveness,

In order for the government to be more responsive, the followings should be considered:

1. properly resource staff COVID-19 *Call Center* with individuals running multiple shifts, guaranteeing 24-hour availability and short response time;

2. ensure that the COVID-19 Response Task Force develops and institutes a framework aimed at facilitating strong coordination and collaboration among the COVID-19 Call Center, the Contact tracers, and communities;
3. establish a post COVID-19 Counselling framework to address the counselling needs of victims.

Sustainability

According to the World Health Organization, several of these health outbreaks will occur in the future. This implies that individual nation-states will need to develop sustainable context-based models/approaches that can be replicated and supported to respond to future outbreaks.

The Governance Commission recommends therefore, that:

1. the NPHIL collaborates with the Ministry of Finance & Development Planning (MFDP) and other relevant institutions to create an escrow account for the purpose of supporting NPHIL's *National Pandemic Response Strategy and Plan*, and establish a clear framework for how that account will be managed;
2. substantial technical, material and other types of investments be made in the NPHIL, MoH, and other state entities created by law to lead the national efforts in combating known and emerging infectious diseases.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is an on-going global emergency. Other members of the global community, including the WHO, are providing financial and technical assistance to countries with fragile health systems like Liberia to tackle the virus. This global effort must be locally enhanced by our ability to strengthen national response capacities over the long term. As a Government, we must focus on promoting good governance by making effectiveness & efficiency, transparency & accountability, proper participation, equity, and the rule of law as key pillars

in the fight against COVID-19. We must also strengthen the scientific and administrative capacities of our public health institutions to effectively manage pandemics of this sort. By making these sorts of investments, we will adequately coordinate activities and avoid the need for multiple ad-hoc committees during outbreaks.