



Malawi Environmental Health Association

A statement on Cholera Outbreak Control in Malawi

The statement is based on the Expert Workshop and the Panel Discussion held on 18th November 2022 themed “What are we missing in the fight against the outbreak?”

7th December 2022

Background

Although preventable, all districts in Malawi have been battling with the Cholera outbreak, which has affected 9189 people and killed 283 people between March 02 and November 21, 2022. The case fatality rate (CFR) is at 3.1% which is way higher than the World Health Organization threshold rate of less than 1%. The economic burden of cholera is significant with an estimated cost of approximately MK15,000 per case per household according to Hsiao, Amber, et al., 2022 (Economic impact of cholera in households in rural southern Malawi). Meanwhile, an average Malawian lives on less than a dollar (~MK1200) per day highlighting the importance of dealing with the current Cholera outbreak decisively.

In light of the prolonged outbreak, the Malawi Environmental Health Association (MEHA) organised an expert workshop and a live panel discussion on Zodiak radio and television to answer the question **“what are we missing in the fight against Cholera?”**. The participants were drawn from all sectors including Ministry of Health, Ministry of Water and Sanitation, Non-Governmental Organizations, the academia and research institutions, traditional and faith leaders. This statement, therefore, highlights MEHAs agreed points and recommendations for a successful response to the ongoing outbreak.

Major challenges:

1. Lack of research data to understand the cholera pathogen and the behaviour of communities in adopting preventive strategies, on which the response should be built.
2. Lack of adequate resources to respond and implement comprehensive and well-coordinated interventions against the outbreak.
3. Low coverage of safe water sources and inadequate sanitary facilities in most communities making them vulnerable to cholera.
4. Poor coordination of Cholera response plan among stakeholders including dissemination of the response plan. Not many partners are aware of the response plan and its contents.
5. Lack of multisectoral approach and clearly defined contributions to the outbreak by key stakeholders including traditional leaders and faith leaders, and other sectors

including NGOs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

Progress and suggested way forward

MEHA would like to applaud the Government of Malawi for declaring the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency on 5th December, 2022. This is in line with the MEHA recommendations made during the Expert Workshop and Panel Discussion aired on Zodiak Radio on 18th November, 2022. The **recommendations** made on the way forward were as follows:

- Declaration of the outbreak as a National Disaster to aid resource mobilization through the department of Disaster Management and partners. This is besides cholera being declared as an outbreak on 3rd March 2022 by the Honorable Minister of Health, madam Khumbize Chiponda, MP.
- Establishment of a multidisciplinary cholera Task Force by Government to coordinate the outbreak response.
- Invest in cholera research to understand the cholera context/epidemiology and behavior of the Cholera bacteria to ensure that decisions on cholera are evidence based and applicable in the Malawian context.
- Government should put in place a strong disease surveillance team to monitor the disease trend, identify cases and trace contacts of the case within shortest time possible capitalizing on the surveillance capacity built during COVID-19 pandemic.
- All stakeholders implementing different programmes to integrate cholera prevention and control interventions.
- Community leaders should assist curbing the outbreak by enacting and enforcing community wide by-laws which will aim to encourage people to chlorinate their water, construct and use toilets all the time and practice good hygiene.
- The fishing communities with temporary structures along the lakeshore should be encouraged to use safe water, they should construct and use toilets and practice good food hygiene all the time.
- The current outbreaks of polio and COVID 19 have put pressure on the existing workforce thereby reducing their time to concentrate on cholera. There is need for the Government to employ more staff and existing community volunteers including Village Health Volunteers, Red Cross Volunteers and other structures to help with the work in the communities.
- Government should intensify vaccinating people using the Oral Cholera Vaccine (OCV) to help boost the immunity of people to achieve herd immunity.

As a country we must work as a team to put up a strong response to end cholera and other preventable diseases. As the saying goes “Prevention is better than cure”, we must continuously conduct risk assessment to be able to prevent the diseases before they affect us.

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