

## **From strategy to impact: Insights from the ARC-WA program on advancing regional health emergency evidence preparedness in Lassa-endemic settings**

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### **Introduction**

Recurrent Lassa fever outbreaks and other health emergencies continue to expose critical gaps in emergency response and evidence generation in West Africa. These challenges are particularly acute in Lassa-endemic countries, where fragile health systems, limited surge capacity, and under-resourced research infrastructure hinder timely decision-making. In response, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) launched the Advancing Research Capacity in West Africa (ARC-WA) program, with the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) and the Medical Research Council Unit, The Gambia (MRCG) as joint Technical Coordinating Partners (TCP).

### **Methods**

ARC-WA aims to strengthen regional readiness for health emergencies, with a strong focus on Lassa-endemic contexts. Using a participatory, stepwise approach grounded in qualitative research, the program began with a stakeholder mapping and landscape assessment based on desk reviews and key informant interviews. This was followed by a consultative workshop in Dakar, Senegal (June 2024; 54 participants) to validate findings and refine engagement strategies. A second workshop in Accra, Ghana (late 2024; 120 participants)

facilitated co-development of a regional vision and stakeholder plan.

### **Results**

This process revealed six critical gaps: limited prioritization of national research preparedness agendas; weak coordination mechanisms; inadequate clinical research infrastructure; fragile regulatory and ethics systems; insufficient collaboration within and across borders; and chronic underfunding. Stakeholders identified practical strategies to address these challenges and accelerate progress toward a more cohesive, regionally owned emergency research agenda. By centering the needs of Lassa-endemic countries, ARC-WA sets a foundation for sustainable, locally led evidence generation.

### **Conclusion**

The program illustrates how collaborative, context-aware initiatives can move from strategy to impact—building resilient systems that are better prepared for future health emergencies.