

## Expanding clinical trial access through a mobile clinical trials unit to strengthen epidemic preparedness in rural and underserved communities in Nigeria

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### **Introduction**

In rural Nigeria, communities often lack access to clinical trial infrastructure. This limits their access to innovation and participation in research, thus weakening preparedness for epidemics. Ensuring equitable access to trials builds trust, supports early detection, and promotes inclusive outbreak response. To bridge this gap, we developed a Mobile Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) to bring vaccine and infectious disease research directly to underserved areas.

### **Methods**

The mobile CTU is part of a wider capacity-strengthening initiative funded by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and delivered by the Medical Research Council Unit The Gambia and the International Vaccine Institute. Built from a modified 20-foot container mounted on a flatbed truck, the unit houses dedicated spaces for laboratory work, pharmacy services, and clinical consultations. It is equipped with solar panels, water storage, refrigeration, ultra-low temperature freezers, and a mobile community

engagement area. Field visits and input from local stakeholders guided the design and planning process.

### **Results**

The mobile CTU is designed for rapid deployment to hard-to-reach areas. It will increase recruitment reach, improve trial participation, and allow for on-site data and sample collection. The design enables decentralized trial delivery and strengthens public health response capacity in emergencies. Initial feedback indicates strong local interest and opportunities for collaboration across sectors.

### **Conclusion**

This mobile CTU model provides a flexible and scalable approach to overcoming infrastructural and geographic barriers to research. It enhances epidemic preparedness by enabling remote communities to participate in trials and gain access to timely medical innovations. The model has strong potential for replication in other resource-constrained settings.