

## **Strengthening clinical trial capacity for epidemic preparedness in West Africa: The ARC-WA project**

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### **Introduction**

Lassa fever remains a significant public health threat in West Africa. Effective epidemic preparedness requires a robust clinical trial infrastructure capable of conducting GCP-compliant vaccine trials. The Advancing Research Capacity in West Africa (ARC-WA) project, funded by CEPI, aims to strengthen regional capacity for a future Phase 3 Lassa fever vaccine efficacy trial and support long-term research readiness across the region.

### **Methods**

Led by a technical coordinating partnership between the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) and the Medical Research Council, The Gambia (MRCG), and supported by MMARCRO, BNITM, and a consortium management group with regional expertise, the ARC-WA project has been ongoing since January 2024 and is implemented through two tracks .

Track A focuses on site-level capacity strengthening. Six clinical trial sites in Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are receiving tailored support in infrastructure upgrades, the development of quality management systems and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and comprehensive staff training in clinical operations, laboratory

systems, data management, finance, and regulatory management.

Track B promotes broader regional preparedness through stakeholder mapping, regional consultations, and workshops to identify gaps and define actions that enable sustainable epidemic response capabilities.

### **Results**

To date, 35 sites across five countries (Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Benin) have been assessed for readiness. Under Track A, targeted improvements are ongoing at six sites, focusing on operational readiness for GCP-compliant trials. Track B activities have fostered national ownership and regional collaboration by engaging local stakeholders in priority-setting and planning.

### **Conclusion**

The ARC-WA project is laying the groundwork for effective clinical trial implementation and long-term epidemic preparedness in West Africa. Through a dual-track approach, it addresses immediate site-level needs while advancing regional systems to support a coordinated response to future outbreaks.