



**GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE
NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY
(NPHA)**

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Building a Stronger Future: Strengthening International Collaboration in Public Health Research for Sierra Leone

Introduction

Sierra Leone, with a population of over 3,700 Ebola survivors, possesses unique strengths that make it a valuable partner for international collaboration in public health research. These strengths not only present valuable opportunities to study post-recovery health and immune responses but also serve as a reminder of the ongoing need to strengthen health systems. The National Public Health Agency (NPHA) strategically leverages these advantages while addressing existing challenges. By fostering international partnerships, we aim to build a robust research infrastructure and enhance grant writing capabilities, ultimately improving public health outcomes in Sierra Leone and around the world.

Illustrative Examples of Our Strengths:

- **Ebola Survivor Population:** Over 3,700 survivors offer an invaluable resource for studying post-recovery health, immune responses, and interventions for long-term complications.
- **Natural Laboratory for Emerging Viruses:** The presence of Marburg and other filoviruses in bats positions Sierra Leone as a crucial site for studying these viruses with global relevance, significantly contributing to outbreak preparedness efforts.
- **Established Research Infrastructure:** Existing biobanking facilities and a pool of skilled NPHA and university researchers create a strong foundation for collaborative research endeavors.
- **Presence of a Health Research Agenda:** A well-defined health research agenda ensures that our studies are strategically aligned with broader public health objectives.

Challenges:

Limited capacity in grant writing and a fragmented research landscape hinder our ability to access funding and conduct comprehensive research. We also face the challenge of securing funding for critical public health programs.

International Collaboration: Building a Shared Future

Proposed Solutions:

1. Fostering International Collaborations:

- **Establish Partnerships:** Partner with leading international research institutions (e.g., NIH, WHO, U.S. CDC, universities) to leverage their expertise and resources.
- **Joint Research Initiatives:** Develop collaborative research projects on priority public health issues like Ebola, Lassa Fever, Marburg, COVID-19, and other emerging infectious diseases.



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- **Knowledge Transfer:** Facilitate knowledge and technology transfer through exchange programs, workshops (e.g., grant writing workshops led by international experts), joint publications, and mentorship opportunities.
2. **Enhancing Grant Writing Capacity:**
- **Training and Mentorship:** Organize grant writing workshops with international experts and pair experienced international grant writers with local researchers for personalized guidance throughout the proposal development.
 - **Grant Management Center:** Create a dedicated center offering proposal development assistance and guidance for researchers.
 - **Funding Database:** Develop a comprehensive database of relevant international funding opportunities, including grants focused explicitly on African research.
3. **Optimizing Biobanking Infrastructure:**
- **Standardization and Expansion:** Work with international partners to standardize biobanking protocols and expand capacity to accommodate samples relevant to national and international research priorities.
 - **Ethical Considerations:** Ensure adherence to the highest ethical standards for biobanking practices, including informed consent and data security.
 - **International Collaboration:** Foster collaboration with international biobanks for data sharing and harmonization, facilitating broader research efforts.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Strengthened Research Network:** Establish a network of at least five international partnerships within a year to advance public health research in Sierra Leone.
- **Improved Grant Writing Skills:** Equip researchers with the expertise to secure funding for crucial public health programs by increasing successful grant proposals by 20% within two years.
- **Enhanced Research Output:** Collaborative efforts generate high-quality research data, which leads to an increase in impactful publications by 30% within three years.
- **Development of New Interventions:** Advance the development of targeted diagnostics, treatments, and preventive measures for infectious diseases.
- **Strengthened Disease Surveillance:** Biobanked samples contribute to national and global outbreak preparedness and response efforts.

Sustainability:

- **Long-Term Partnerships:** Develop long-term collaborative agreements with local and international research institutions to exchange knowledge and share resources.
- **Capacity Building:** Train local researchers in grant writing, biobanking management, and research methodology to ensure long-term sustainability.



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- **Fee-for-Service Model:** Explore a fee-for-service model in which the NPHA offers specific services, such as sample storage and analysis, to other research institutions. This can generate revenue to support ongoing operations.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Seek partnerships with the private sector to secure funding for the NPHA operations. Private companies may be interested in supporting research relevant to their products or social responsibility initiatives.

Call to Action

We invite international research institutions, funding bodies, universities, government agencies, private sector entities, and public health organizations to partner with us in this crucial endeavor. By leveraging our unique assets and fostering international collaborations, we can build a more robust public health research infrastructure. This partnership will not only contribute to a healthier Sierra Leone but also provide an opportunity for international partners to expand their research horizons and make a significant impact on global health security.