Qualitative Evaluation Report

on

Implementation Support Unit (ISU) Project

At

Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)

By

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1. INTRODUCTION

The collaboration between Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and Resolve To Save Life (RTSL) dated back to 2017 following Nigeria's Joint External Evaluation (JEE) of the International Health Regulations (IHR), and was formalized in 2019. In 2011 NCDC was established to respond to the challenges of public health emergencies in the country and to enhance preparedness and response to epidemics through prevention, detection, and control of communicable diseases.

RTSL is an International public health initiative headquartered in the USA to collaborate with country governments to implement strategies for epidemic prevention and improved health security. In Nigeria, RTSL has among others, supported the implementation of the National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS), national yellow fever, measles, and rubella laboratory network strengthening, including programme management capacity development, and institutional development initiatives.

The collaboration between Resolve to Save Lives (RTSL) and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) aim to (1) increase epidemic preparedness, (2) enhance the Implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) of 2005 towards improved health security in Nigeria. The NCDC and RTSL collaboration is marshaled through two platforms i.e. Implementation Support Unit (ISU), and the Laboratory Technical Support Staff (LTSS). ISU project provides technical supports to the development and implementation of projects to strengthen surveillance systems, emergency response operations, and the public health workforce. The LTSS aims to enhance laboratory operations and resources tailored to sustain an integrated national laboratory network with a robust sample and vaccine transportation, and information sharing system.

1.1 Evaluation Objective

The main objective of this evaluation is to obtain insight into the performance of the project implementation to inform project re-design going forward for better impact in the country.

1.2 Project Theory of Change

Figure 1: Illustrating Theory of Change for the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) Project

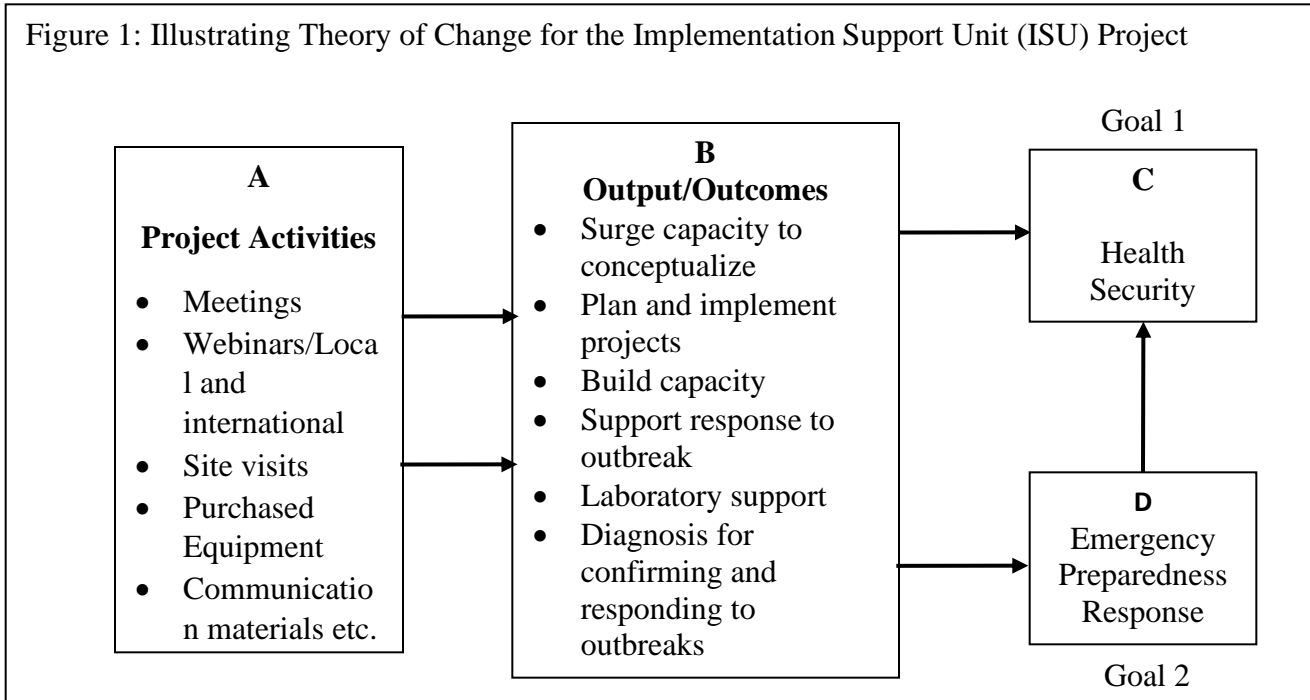| A

Project Activities

• Meetings
• Webinars/Local and international
• Site visits
• Purchased Equipment
• Communication materials etc. | B
Output/Outcomes
• Surge capacity to conceptualize
• Plan and implement projects
• Build capacity
• Support response to outbreak
• Laboratory support
• Diagnosis for confirming and responding to outbreaks | Goal 1

C

Health Security

D
Emergency Preparedness Response

Goal 2 |

Figure 1 above illustrates the theory of change for the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) project. Project theory of change describes and explains the impact of a project from the beneficiary of stakeholder perspective. Concerning ISU, the theory states that change in emergency preparedness response and overall health security will occur as program activities listed in inbox A are executed thus, stimulating output/outcome indicators which then engender improved emergency response preparedness of NCDC and health security of the country.

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Data gathering involved a desk review of project documents and key informant interviews among 12 knowledgeable participants who are well acquainted with the ISU project that is embedded within NCDC. Data analysis employed phenomenological methodological theory to understand keywords and concepts used by key informants during the data collection process. Occurrence or frequency of words/concepts suggests their imprints in the minds of the respondents. A key component of the understanding of words and concepts used by respondents is the link between the number of occurrences and the importance of such words and concepts, especially when contextualizing within the data. The analysis involved identifying words/concepts, a combination of words, and concepts to form a family of words and concepts

and emerging themes. Aggregation of words/concepts produced emerging themes that are explained and substantiated within the study data.

3. KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Knowledge about Resolve To Save Lives

Table 1: Occurrence of words/concepts on knowledge about Resolve To Save Lives (RTSL)			
Word/Concept		*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1	Laboratory/sample management	10	7.1
2	Support	35	25
3	Knowledge/capacity building/training	22	15.7
4	Outbreak/Response/preparedness	18	12.9
5	Program/Project/Planning/implementation	22	15.7
6	Institutional/development	9	6.4
7	RTSL	8	5.7
8	Technical/security	8	5.7
9	Communication	4	2.9
10	National/sub-National Level	4	2.9
	Total	*140*	*100*

The evaluation team asked key informants about their knowledge of the RTSL support to the NCDC through the ISU. As Table 1 above shows, the four common words/concepts used in response to this question was 'support' (number of occurrences = 35; 25%), followed by 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (number of occurrences = 22; 15.7%), 'program/project/planning/implementation,' (occurrence = 22; 15.7%), and 'outbreak/response/preparedness' (occurrence = 18; 12.9%). Results from these keywords/concepts suggest that key informants reported that RTSL supports NCDC mainly in the areas of 'knowledge increase through capacity building and training, outbreak response preparedness, and program/project planning and implementation'. The quote below from respondent 2 supports the finding below.

"....capacity building in general. Just as one of the key officials of the management in NCDC, we were trying to look at the gaps in terms of the strength, the workload of which we encounter in the various analysis of diseases within a public health laboratory and also the network of labs too. What are the gaps regarding the turnaround times and ensuring that the samples were taken at the field and then brought to the lab on time. So that the results will be accessed too by both the clinician and then the respondent, that is the public health respondent for them to make an informed decision. So, on this matter, I think Resolve to Save Lives have been able to provide the support in terms of manpower, which is highly required at that level."

3.2 Response on Collaboration Between NCDC and RTSL

Table 2: Occurrence of words/concepts on collaboration between NCDC and RTSL		
Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1 Laboratory/sample management/surveillance	31	8.4
2 Support	52	14.0
3 Knowledge/capacity building/training	42	11.3
4 Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	46	12.4
5 Program/Project/Planning/implementation	58	15.7
6 Institutional/development	23	6.2
7 RTSL	18	4.9
8 Technical/security	14	3.8
9 Communication/coordination/collaboration	32	8.7
10 National/sub-National Level	18	4.9
11 Resource/management/logistics	20	5.4
12 Monitoring/evaluation	16	4.3
Total	*370*	*100*

Data analysis contextualizes the most common keywords/concepts in response to the question on the interface between NCDC and RTSL, and the impact of the ISU project implementation. Five most common keywords/concepts that occurred during the interview were; 'program/project/planning/implementation' (occurrence = 58, 5.7%), 'support' (occurrence = 52, 14.0%), 'outbreak/epidemic/response/preparedness' (occurrence = 46, 12.4%), 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 42, 11.3%), and 'communication/coordination/collaboration' (occurrence = 3, 8.7%). Other keywords/concepts used in response to the question on NCDC interface with RTSL and the impact include 'laboratory/sample management/surveillance' (occurrence = 31, 8.4%), institutional/development (occurrence = 23, 6.2%), and 'resource/management/logistics' (occurrence = 20, 5.4%). These results when contextualized in the data suggest that key informants opined that the ISU project implementation impacted NCDC mostly in the areas of knowledge transfer through capacity building and training, improved preparedness and outbreak response to the epidemic, improved coordination and collaboration capabilities through demonstrated communication strategies of the project.

3.3 Impression about ISU Impact

Figure 1: Occurence of three organizations mentioned during the Key Informant Interviews

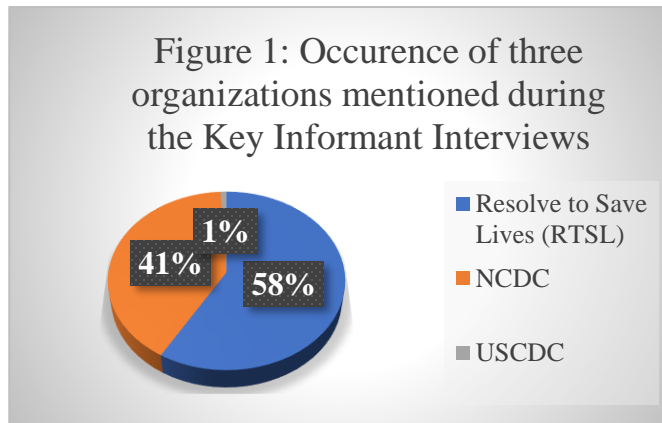- ■ Resolve to Save Lives (RTSL)
- ■ NCDC
- ■ USCDC

Figure 1 above shows the number of occurrences of three main stakeholders mentioned in the ISU project. RTSL had the highest occurrence (occurrence = 196; 58%), followed by NCDC (occurrence = 136; 41%), and CDC (occurrence = 3, 1%). These findings suggest to a large extent the importance key informants placed on the implementing partners for the success of the ISU. The findings suggest how the key informants perceived the role each of the three organizations plays in the implementation of ISU which may be in terms of management strategies, funding, and logistics.

3.4 Achievements Based on Areas of the Intervention

Figure 2: Occurence of Program Focussed Areas

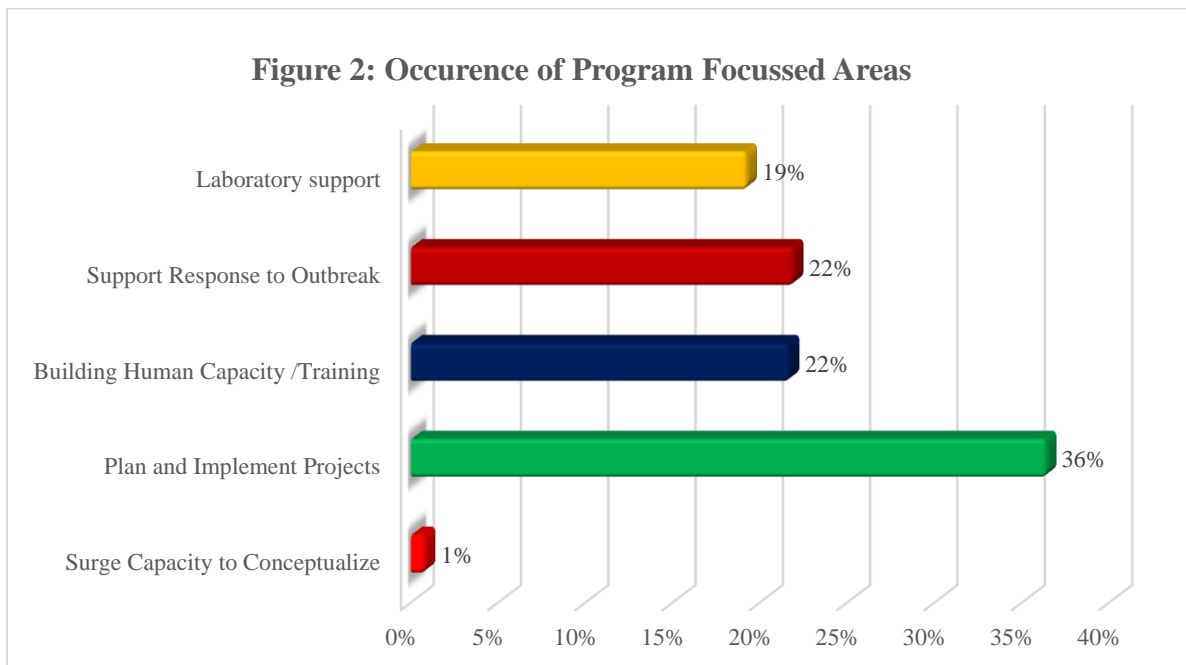| Focus Area	Percentage
Laboratory support	19%
Support Response to Outbreak	22%
Building Human Capacity /Training	22%
Plan and Implement Projects	36%
Surge Capacity to Conceptualize	1%

Figure 2 above shows the distribution of the occurrence of the key areas of intervention based on the results of the key informant interviews conducted. The findings suggest that plan and implementation of projects occurred the most (occurrence 314, 36%), followed by both support response to outbreak (occurrence = 189, 22%), and building human capacity (occurrence = 187, 22%), laboratory support (occurrence =166, 19%), and lastly surge capacity to conceptualize (occurrence = 7, 1%). These results may suggest areas of intervention that the key informants perceived were the focused areas of the ISU project, and perhaps the importance placed on the different areas as well.

3.5 Specific ISU Project Support and Usefulness

Table 3: Occurrence of words/concepts on collaboration between NCDC and RTSL		
Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1 Laboratory/sample management/surveillance	86	14.6
2 Support	86	14.6
3 Knowledge/capacity building/training	105	17.8
4 Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	96	16.3
5 Program/Project/Planning/implementation	68	11.5
6 Institutional/development	30	5.1
7 RTSL	26	4.4
8 Technical/security	17	2.9
9 Communication/coordination/collaboration	28	4.8
10 Vehicle /Transportation /Mobility	17	2.9
11 Resource/management/logistics	30	5.1
Total	*589*	*100*

Key informants who participated in the ISU project evaluation were asked their opinion on the project's specific support on capacity building and usefulness to NCDC. Keywords/concepts that occurred most in the responses were; 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 105; 17.8%), 'outbreak/epidemic/response/preparedness' (occurrence = 96; 16.3%), 'support' (occurrence = 86; 14.6%), 'laboratory/sample management/surveillance' (occurrence = 86; 14.6%), and 'program/project/planning/preparedness' (occurrence = 68; 11.5%). Other common keywords/concepts were 'institutional/development' (occurrence = 30; 5.1%), 'resource/management/logistics' (occurrence = 30; 5.1%), and 'communication/coordination/collaboration' (occurrence = 28; 4.8%). Interpreting these words/concepts within the data suggest that support of RTSL through ISU were useful to NCDC specifically in the areas of knowledge transfer through capacity building and training, response preparedness to outbreak and epidemic, laboratory support in terms of sample management and surveillance, and program/project planning and implementation. The ordering of usefulness of the areas as perceived by the respondents can be deduced from the distribution i.e. knowledge

transfer and response to outbreak seem to top the list of usefulness or contributing component of the ISU project. The excerpt below from key informant number 9 supports this claim.

"So, for capacity building, one of the ways the project has supported is first to develop resources, and also provide need tools that erm one could use to work collaboratively. One example is, I have forgotten the name of this tool, but there was this erm work erm plan, this erm excel sheets that was provided to us, I have forgotten the name of this platform, so and that, if you visit the platform you can track your own activities, what you have implemented, what the gaps are and all that. So, with that tool we are able to work collaboratively without having to meet every-time."

3.4 Support to NCDC on Outbreak Response

Table 4: Occurrence of words/concepts on outbreak response support		
Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1 Support	31	27.0
2 Knowledge/capacity building/training	28	24.3
3 Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	56	48.7
Total	*115*	*100*

Key informants of this evaluation were asked about the opinion on the outbreak response support of ISU to NCDC. The most common words/concepts on this were; 'outbreak/epidemic/response/preparedness' (occurrence = 56; 48.7%), and 'support' (occurrence = 31; 27%) and 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 28; 24.3%). Thematic understanding of these keywords/concepts based on the textual data suggest that the ISU project was successful in transferring knowledge and skills on outbreak response and epidemic preparedness to the NCDC staff through capacity building in the form of training, webinars, and on the job training on a daily bases since the project staff were embedded in the NCDC project and activities. The statement below from key informant no 1 strengthens the findings on outbreak response as central to the results obtained in this sub-section.

"Yea so in terms of outbreak response, resolve to save live has always been the forefront uh [inaudible segment] and uh human [inaudible segment] the 2018 largest uh outbreak of uh uh lassa fever, resolve to save live were able to mobilise uh some uh resources, especially human resources to the state and also did some uh procurements uh that supported uh outbreak response uh at the state level. Also, at national level, principally for this uh COVID 19 response that we are currently on, uh I know resolve to save live also been in the forefront that mobilised resources, principally also human resources and uh deployed them to the state in terms of uh supporting states to get through how they've navigate their response uh activities at the state level."

Table 5: Rating on outbreak response support by the ISU project		
Scale	Number	Percent
<7	2	18%
7 to 8	4	36%
9 to 10	5	45%
	11	100%

The key informants of the ISU project evaluation were asked to rate outbreak response support of the ISU project to NCDC. The rating scale was between 1 to 10, with 1 suggesting the lowest, and 10 the highest. Results of the rating corroborated the findings on the occurrence of keywords/concepts in Table 4 above. Eleven key informants rated the outbreak response support of which 5 (45% of key informants) scored the project 90% and above, 4 (36% of key informants) scored the project between 70% and 80%, and only 2 key informants (18%) rated the outbreak response support below 70%.

3.5 Support on Joint External Evaluation (JEE) and National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS)

Table 5: Occurrence of words/concepts on support for JEE and NAPHS			
Word/Concept		*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1	Laboratory/sample management/surveillance	38	21.7
2	Support	24	13.7
3	Knowledge/capacity building/training	33	18.9
4	Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	18	10.3
5	Program/Project/Planning/implementation	28	16.0
6	Technical/security	15	8.6
7	Monitoring/evaluation	19	10.9
	Total	*175*	*100*

The key informants of the ISU project evaluation were asked their opinion on the project support to the execution of JEE and NAPHS which are key NCDC activities. The most common words/concepts reported in the textual data were; 'laboratory/sample management/surveillance' (occurrence = 38, 21.7%), and 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 33, 18.9%), 'program/project/planning/implementation' (occurrence = 28, 16%), 'Support' (occurrence = 24, 13.7%). Other keywords/concepts included 'monitoring/evaluation' (occurrence = 19, 10.9%), and 'outbreak/epidemic/response/preparedness' (occurrence = 18, 10.3%). Thematic interpretation of these results based on the textual data is that NCDC as an institution was able to execute the JEE and NAPHS successfully based on key support received from the ISU project especially in respect of support on laboratory operations, and knowledge enhancement through capacity building, training, webinars among others.

Table 6: Rating by key informants on the support received on JEE and NAPHS		
Scale	Number	Percent
<7	2	18%
7 to 8	7	64%
9 to 10	2	18%
	11	100%

The key informants of the ISU project evaluation were asked to rate the support received on Joint External Evaluation (JEE) and National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) implementation. The rating was scaled between 1 to 10, with 1 suggesting the lowest, and 10 the highest. Results of the rating strengthened the findings on the occurrence of keywords/concepts in Table 5 above. Eleven key informants cutting across stakeholders rated the outbreak response support of which 2 (18% of key informants) scored the project 90% and above, 7 (64% of key informants) scored the project between 70% and 80%, and only 2 key informants (18%) rated the support on JEE and NAPHS support below 70%.

Results on the occurrence of keywords/concepts and rating combined above suggest that improvement in laboratory operations (including sample management and surveillance), and knowledge transfer, and program/project planning and implementation were key areas that enhanced NCDC's performance on the JEE and NAPHS.

4. CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

Table 6: Occurrence of words/concepts on the challenges and constraints of the ISU project		
Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1 Laboratory/sample management/surveillance	32	10.3
2 Support	55	17.7
3 Knowledge/capacity building/training	64	20.6
4 Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	29	9.4
5 Program/Project/Planning/implementation	54	17.4
6 Institutional/development	19	6.1
7 Resource/management/logistics	22	7.1
8 Challenges	35	11.3
Total	*310*	*100*

Key informants of this evaluation were asked about the main challenges in the implementation of key ISU project activities. The distribution on the occurrence of keywords/concepts in terms of challenges experienced with respect to ISU project support on JEE and NAPHS were mostly on 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 64, 20.6%), challenges on support to these activities (occurrence = 55, 17.7%), 'program/project/planning/implementation' (occurrence = 54, 17.4%), 'challenges on the JEE and NAPHS' activities (occurrence = 35, 11.3%),

'laboratory/sample management/surveillance' (occurrence = 32, 10.3%). These results suggest that challenges experienced in the implementation of the ISU project were in the areas of knowledge transfer through capacity building and training, project planning and implementation, and laboratory operations to mention three. Despite the training received, capacity building is still a challenge for NCDC because the young crop of staff that were recently employed and need to be equipped through training provided by the ISU project as opened by key informant no 3 below.

"uh! it's it's a challenge because they take off some of the burden in um managing some of the resources that we need and um also in technical support too it's a young institution so we have new young colleagues that are coming on board and ah at times unburden may be a challenge and um most times for us we may not even be able to do the proper mentoring because you always need to act very fast so that's one aspect which we find some challenges. so, them coming on board really helps us to make sure that we gain speed in the work that we do while we gradually build up this uh other colleagues in the organization"

5. SUSTAINABILITY

Table 7: Occurrence of words/concepts on areas of project sustainability		
Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1 Laboratory/sample management/surveillance	16	6.5
2 Support	46	18.8
3 Knowledge/capacity building/training	65	26.5
4 Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	33	13.5
5 Program/Project/Planning/implementation	53	21.6
6 Payment /Money	16	6.5
7 Sustainability	16	6.5
Total	*245*	*100*

Sustainability is a required indicator of program/project success as expressed in the global sustainable development goals (SDGs). In the results of this evaluation, words/concepts that occurred in relations to project sustainability were 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 65, 26.5%), program/project planning/implementation' (occurrence = 53, 21.6%), and 'outbreak/epidemic/respondence/preparedness' (occurrence = 33, 13.5%). And the remaining three common words/concepts related to sustainability were, 'laboratory/sample management/surveillance' (occurrence = 16, 6.5%), and 'payment/money issues' (occurrence = 16, 6.5%).

Drawing insights from the data, these results suggest that sustainably can be attained in the areas of knowledge transfer through continuous capacity building and training, program/project planning and implementation, laboratory operations, and payment or money issues in terms of salary or welfare. As opined by key informant no 11 below, continuous capacity building is the best way to attain sustainability of the ISU project impact.

"Of course, for [eh] capacity building you can never take it away from anybody. So, when you build capacity, except the person is not interested in what he is doing, its, these are things that live with you for good aha!, and then erm some of the [eh] processes that have been put in place are processes that we should work with overtime; probably improve a bit on as [eh] things evolve in [eh] response to infectious diseases, and one thing I like about erm Resolve is that they don't let you go, they keep up with you. I still have to do call-ins; you know!, on [eh] bi-weekly basis to keep up with what is happening in the world and that that's a huge capacity building for us. So, this is sustainable if you want to sustain it as an individual and as [eh] an institution, if we want to sustain that, we should encourage staff of NCDC to always key into such eeerm eer growth capacity building, you know!. So, if erm, if I must say, they have already put that sustainability ongoing and therefore, we have to keep keying into it, and they make it very interesting, so its' not [eh], it's' not a pressure on you, but its' something you will even like to go to, to learn more and to be able to bring back more to teach others."

Key informant no 1 had the following contributions on sustainability in respect to laboratory operations and outbreak response.

"……the first orientation that was done at the national reference lab, I was uh invited by the resolve to save live team and uh we we provided that support to uh the non-health uh actors who were part of of the project. In terms of laboratory I'll say that this has greatly improved uh the support for sample manage the ?(trianess)? uh using the ?(trianess)? platform, although, there were issues with end to end visibility of that uh I'm quite aware that there was a continuous quality improvement process that was supposed to be instituted to ensure that yea they improve upon that. But uh overall, i'll say that this is one aspect uh where that has been implemented successfully. And I think that with that platform, even after the project, uh it's something is sustainable because uh it's already been established and uh the mechanism for driving that has also already been (phone rings in background) integrated so, this are the few things I wast to say now."

6. AREAS OF IMPACT BASED ON STRENGHT

Table 8: Occurrence of words/concepts on areas that the ISU project had more capacity to make an impact		
Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1 Knowledge/capacity building/training	31	100
Total	*31*	*100*

The question about the ISU project area of possibly making more impact was only on 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 31, 100%). This result implies that the main area of the ISU project with potentials for expansion or scalability is knowledge transfer through capacity building, training, webinars, and hands-on as necessary. Key informant no 5

corroborated this result in the following except on the uniqueness of the ISU project on capacity building which encompasses adequate reporting of the project outcome.

"that is reporting …. that the ISU have their strength which I know so if I will now address your question on the two that I know you have done well, excellent well may not have given you 100% percent and may not have given you Close to 100% but the sake I will give you 70% the rage of 70% your impact has already or … to our input and it is what we report that we will inform the national data if your impact on our capacity sitting were not been adequate we will been having inadequate but because of your impact on us have been very, very use … you have imported that usefulness to us and is making us to report correctly either at the surveillance and epidemiologist angle …."

7. UNINTENDED PROJECT SUCCESSES

Table 9: Occurrence of words/concepts on unintended project success		
Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1 Knowledge/capacity building/training	26	40.6
2 Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	19	29.7
3 Program/Project/Planning/implementation	19	29.7
Total	*64*	*100*

Key informants of this evaluation were asked about the unintended successes that the ISU project achieved during the implementation. Keywords/concepts used in this section were, 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 26, 40.6%), 'outbreak/epidemic/response/preparedness,' (occurrence = 19, 29.7%), and program/project/planning/implementation' (occurrence = 19, 29.7%). These areas of unintended project success should be considered for future possible scalability or expansion. One of the unintended successes of the project according to key informant no 7 was the support on communication platform and information management training which was out of the mandate of the ISU project but turned out a very successful legacy.

"I think I've mentioned one, that's the was not really part of the, that's the support for the Connect Center. They actually helped us with the Connect Center and also part of the implementation, trying to train and make sure that the agents in the Connect Center are able to have that professional touch, in terms of receiving and giving information to the populace. Of course. I really wish that yes, it could be sustained. That's one very important area that we are trying to build up right now in NCDC. We are trying to build up the expertise and professional call agents. And so that area is very key to us. We see that area as the face of NCDC. Because when people call and need information, that's the first contact we have with NCDC. So, we'll need to build up that section very well. So yes, we would really appreciate if a they come in and help us in that area because we've had support from other partners but we really need more because we need to build a career in that area for our call agents."

8. PRIORITY AREAS FOR BEST OUTPUT

	Table 10: Occurrence of words/concepts on priority areas for best output		
	Word/Concept	**Number**	**Percent (%)**
1	Laboratory/sample management/surveillance	39	32.0
2	Support	20	16.4
3	Knowledge/capacity building/training	30	24.6
4	Outbreak/epidemic/Response/preparedness	17	13.9
5	Program/Project/Planning/implementation	16	13.1
	Total	**122**	**100**

Key informants of this evaluation were asked about the priority areas for best output by the ISU project. The most common keywords/concepts used to address this question were, 'laboratory/sample management/surveillance' (occurrence = 39, 32.0%), 'knowledge/capacity building/training,' (occurrence = 30, 24.6%), 'outbreak/epidemic/response/preparedness' (occurrence = 13, 13.1%). These key areas especially on laboratory operations, and knowledge transfer through capacity building area of project support that can be explored in the future for maximum performance and impact. Key informants 1 and 2 expressed their thoughts on laboratory operations, and capacity building respectively where the ISU project adds more value or improves NCDC performance and output.

From Key informant 1: "Now, if you look there's one key area and I think resolve to save live is very good in terms of resolving crisis, in terms of operations. If you look at it since the time [inaudible segment] til now, we still have issue with lab. In fact let me mention categorically, since I started supporting health preparedness and response unit of NCDC, I do know that lab sample management has been an issue in NCDC and up to now for all the disease outbreaks we've had take it from meningitis, lassa fever, measles, yellow fever, COVID pandemic, influenza all that. Up till now we are still in that darkness of logging in sample backlogs. You know, what I mean there are alw at every instance in time in NCDC for all response outbreaks, there is always backlog. It's either uh sample are there they are not yet tested or they are tested their results have not yet been uploaded. So, I've found it very cumbersome that this is a problem and there should be a way and mechanism of resolving it…………... I feel that there should be a mechanism where uh resolve to save live can acc [inaudible segment] I could recommend that. They should troubleshoot into that system and see what the main drivers of sample backlogs uh in terms of uh you know testing the samples, process receiving the samples, processing the samples and transmitting back results."

From Key Informant 2: "As I said initially, I would have loved Resolve to Life to sustain capacity building, in a way that the already engaged staff can be supported by recommending them to the government to be fully employed. To avoid that loss because of the training on the project and their proficiency at that level which they have trained on the project. Their efficiency would show that they have been so much productive to the system, instead of loosing them to the

labour market, we should still engage them and employ them as permanent staff. This would improve the quality of result coming out of the laboratory and also improve the efficiency of the National Reference Lab and support the system by reducing the unemployment rate in the country."

9. RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

	Table 11: Occurrence of words/concepts on recommendations and conclusions		
	Word/Concept	*Number*	*Percent (%)*
1	Support	15	17.9
2	Knowledge/capacity building/training	31	36.9
3	Program/Project/Planning/implementation	21	25.0
4	Sustainability	17	20.2
	Total	*84*	*100*

Key words/concepts reported on recommendations occurred mostly on 'knowledge/capacity building/training' (occurrence = 31, 36.7%), followed by 'program/project/planning/implementation' (occurrence = 21, 25%), and 'sustainability' (occurrence = 17, 20.2%). Recommendations based on most occurred key words/concepts are presented first followed by others.

On Capacity Building and Enhancement:

- It was recommended that the ISU project should train their consultants regularly to make them more relevant and able to take-on ever complex challenges in the marketplace. This recommendation is said by at least two key informants and is succinctly captured by the following quote from key informant no. 7.

  "I think I will recommend that the regularly trained consultants and not just assumed that because they have engaged them as consultants, they have the expertise to mentor and train others. Sometimes you think you know it all and at the end of the day, you might not just know lots of things."

On Project Implementation and Management:

- A key recommendation echoed by some key informant is that the ISU project staff ae much embedded in the NCDC operations and should not just break off at the end of its term but should remain with the center for at least a year or more to enable sustainability strengthening of all the areas of its operations. It was a consensus that abrupt departure may lead to a decline in the gains made at NCDC over the years concerning standards of performance and delivery of services. Key informant no 10 surmises this recommendation as below.

"I have felt their presence, I have worked with their staff, sometimes I forget that they are not NCDC staff, ehe. even the REDISSE staff, I use to call them REDISSE without knowing that they are linked to RS erhm resolve to save lives, but eventually I got to know, so its' a huge support and I will like them to erm continue to provide that kind of support erm and even extend the tentacle to much, to my own department which is the Prevention, Programs and Knowledge Management department, so if their objectives can accommodate more of what we do in this department, that will be well appreciated……..And then of course, the area of project management, we need more support on that, since it's a project implementing unit bah?"

This recommendation of continued stay of the ISU project in NCDC suggests that the structure and culture the imbues sustainability may not be adequate yet especially the funding component with comes with the project implementation.

On sustainability the following recommendations were made:

- Another suggestion given to ensure sustainability and keep the ISU project ongoing is to transition to a "think-tank" organization where ideas can crystallize, and difficult and complex issues are discussed with solutions provided in a timely fashion. The excerpt below from key informant no 1 captures this recommendation.

  "Once you exit everything cripples. So the only way you can achieve that sustainability plan is to maintain some few project staff to remain institutional think thanks of the organization they are transitioning to so that they are able to marshal support for them at high level, even when they are not the implementers they guide that process until that organization that receive the transition gain full traction and momentum to sustain that on their own. And that cannot be done in one month two months, you need one fiscal complete financial year to see that yea keep that traction uh through continuous quality improvement."

- Another angle to sustainability is that the project should focus on other areas of the RTSL and NCDC collaborations especially synergy in all areas of operations such as surveillance, preparedness, laboratory. The synergy of all components of the NCDC operations should include strong communication linkages between state vs. state operations, and national vs. state implementations. The recommendation is that the ISU project can examine these substantive areas of project implementation for subsequent funding and a way of strengthening sustainability in the long-run. This recommendation was expressly stated by key informant no 2 below.

  "The major recommendation is, there are other areas that may need the support of NRL aside the areas of target by RSL. The area of the collaboration between the various arms of the response, that is the surveillance, the preparedness, and response team as well as

the laboratory. There is supposed to be a synergy in all these three areas. Even up to the case management, in all the areas, all the pillars of response there should be a synergy in all the pillars. There are still some challenges at the state level, not at the national actually. Of which all the samples that are been moved or shipped from state supposed not to have been shipped because there is inadequate communication."

CONCLUSION:

- The ISU project has performed well based on the responses from the informants who participated in this evaluation and the overwhelming recommendations for continued implementation and sustainability. The impact of the project seems to be more on: surge capacity to conceptualize, plan and implement projects, capacity building, and perhaps, support response to outbreak output/outcomes, but may have some critical gaps to fill in the areas of laboratory support, and diagnoses for confirming and responding to outbreaks. These results imply that the ISU project may have contributed more to the theory of change in terms of meeting the health security goals of the country, than emergency preparedness response to the epidemic.