

Building Health Resilience in West Africa: A Mobile Unit Bringing Vaccine Research to Rural Communities

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In a world where timely access to health services can mean the difference between effective management and crisis, bringing care closer to communities is not just essential; it is critical. That is the goal of the exciting new initiative under the Advancing Research Capacity in West Africa (ARC-WA) project, which is taking shape one kilometre at a time.

With funding from the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and led by the Medical Research Council Unit The Gambia (MRCG) in partnership with the International Vaccine Institute (IVI), the ARC-WA project is currently building a **mobile clinical trials unit (CTU)** that will soon bring high-quality vaccine research closer to communities. As a pilot, the mobile unit will be stationed at the **Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Teaching Hospital (ATBUTH)** in Bauchi, Northern Nigeria.

Built for Reach and Impact: Still under construction, the unit is more than just a truck; it is a fully equipped mobile extension of a clinical research site with solar-powered electricity. It is designed using a modified 20-foot container mounted on a flatbed truck. It is built to deliver Good Clinical Practice (GCP)-compliant research in a convenient and patient-centric manner.

Onboard the mobile clinic are laboratory and pharmacy spaces, cold storage for vaccines, satellite internet for real-time data sharing, standard air filtration, and biosafety systems. It also contains ready-to-use tents for consultations and community engagement. This infrastructure offers a comprehensive and unique opportunity to bring health research and care to the doorsteps of communities where such services are often unavailable. All activities will be conducted by trained personnel following standardized procedures.

Voices Behind the Innovation: “This clinic is a game changer in our communities that will ensure we reach communities that were previously out of our research scope”, says **Prof. Jibrin Yusuf**, Director and Project Lead at ATBUTH. “It will boost recruitment, enhance follow-up care, and, more importantly, build trust where it’s most needed”, he added.

Dr. Ahmed Futa, MRCG Clinician and Lead for clinical trial capacity strengthening activities at ATBUTH, highlighted that “the ARC-WA project is about building capacity using sustainable measures. The project is not just preparing for potential outbreaks; it seeks to invest in systems, people, and infrastructure that will define long-term health resilience.”

Designed for Flexibility and Preparedness: In line with the CEPI 100-day mission, to respond to an emergency within 100 days, the mobile CTU will serve multiple purposes, including provision of routine health services, vaccination drives, and emergency outbreak response. Its design allows it to be deployed across Nigeria and, if needed, to other West African countries, making it a key asset in both national and regional epidemic preparedness strategies.

Looking Ahead: This mobile unit is the first of its kind under ARC-WA’s regional implementation plan. The goal is to scale up the model, making mobile health research a standard component of research and epidemic response across the sub-region.

By meeting communities where they are, the mobile unit will ensure that **no one is left behind**.