

## COUNTDOWN Liberia’s Implementation Research Cycle: Moving ahead with the announcement of our extension

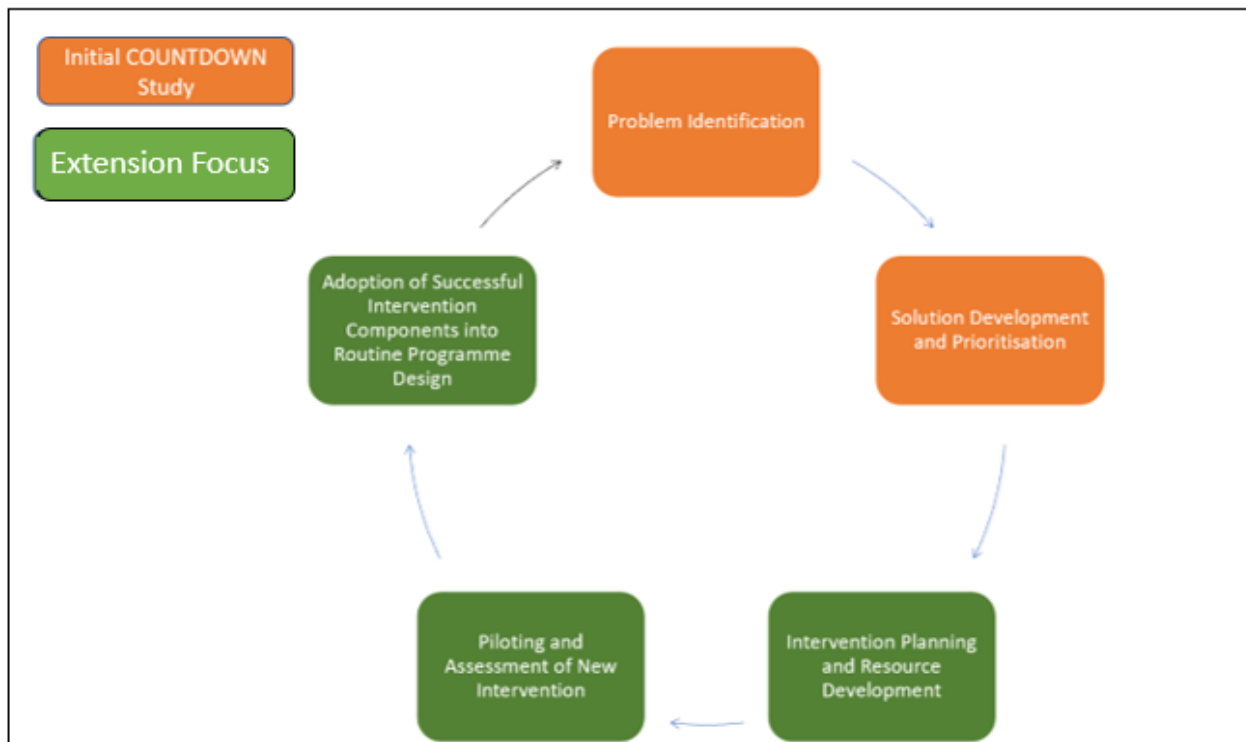
Georgina V. Kparteh Zawolo, Kelly Smyth, Motto Nganda and Laura Dean

### Introduction

Implementation research is an embedded research process and therefore it was critical to engage key stakeholders in the development of innovative interventions to address programme bottlenecks as key starting points for new thinking (WHO 2013). COUNTDOWN research in Liberia has utilised a health systems research approach to focus on implementation research questions identified by practitioners working on NTD control. Findings within the initial COUNTDOWN research study in Liberia identified key bottlenecks within NTD programme delivery that need to be addressed to support the equitable increase in therapeutic coverage of mass drug administration (MDA). Key gaps identified were linked to [awareness, accessibility, acceptability, and availability of mass drug administration amongst community members](#), as well as [limitations in the motivation, training, and supervision of health workers and community-based programme implementers](#).

Following problem identification, the research team used participatory visual methods to disseminate findings to communities, county health teams, and national programme implementers to support the development of solutions to address [programme bottlenecks](#). Once solutions were identified, we then worked with National NTD programme stakeholders to prioritise programme gaps and solutions to develop key intervention areas for piloting in this study phase.

Figure 1 below, shows our overall implementation research cycle





From the dissemination and solution development workshops, the first action taken was to develop a communication strategy that will address gap in awareness and knowledge. The development of this strategy is critical to achieving greater awareness and knowledge surrounding the treatment and prevention of targeted NTDs in Liberia. Messages developed within the strategy are linked to the evidence on knowledge gaps and preferred modes of communication identified amongst different groups and aim to improve adherence to treatment with appropriate medication. This was the first communication strategy developed in the history of the NTD programme in Liberia and can be viewed [here](#).

The development of the strategy was a key collaborative success between the Ministry of Health NTD Department and the Health Promotion Unit.

### **Moving forward**

In 2019, the **COUNTDOWN** programme was awarded a two year extension by funder DFID and research activities will now continue until 2021 to implement key interventions developed in collaboration with the national NTD programme and prioritized by stakeholders. Continued **COUNTDOWN** work focuses on piloting a decentralized planning, management and implementation process for mass drugs administration in Liberia. This is important to the health system and the NTD programme as the pilot testing will adapt successful intervention components into routine programme design. Activities will include: re-introduction of community level census processes and associated training; piloting of micro-planning at county level; and establishing community monitoring teams to supervise MDA. Our approach to intervention design and piloting will draw on action research methodologies to ensure that findings are adopted into programme delivery in real time.