The Centre on Global Health Security is supporting the extractive industry to understand, assess and mitigate the risk posed to the sector by infectious disease outbreaks.

Extractive industry and health

Extractive industry operations bring about changes in local environmental, social and economic conditions that increase the potential for contact between wildlife, livestock and human populations. These changes act as major drivers of disease emergence. In effect, the extractive industry alters local ecosystems and this could facilitate the spread of emerging infectious diseases (EIDs).

Concurrently, extractive industry projects are vulnerable to EID outbreaks, including the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, and therefore have a direct interest in supporting prevention strategies and strengthening the response capacity of national health systems.

Project focus

Under the Preparedness and Response project, funded by USAID, IDRAM aims to develop tools and evidence that will enable the extractive industry to reduce the risk of EID outbreaks and better prepare for them. IDRAM also encourages greater collaboration between the extractive industry, the public health sector and other actors (multilateral agencies, NGOs) to improve preparedness and response capacity when an outbreak does occur.
What we have achieved

• In 2014, an IDRAM pilot study in the Katanga region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) evaluated an audit toolkit developed by USAID for improving EID risk assessment and management on established mining sites.

• A qualitative study showed that mining companies have good internal systems in place for disease control and prevention, but cannot control outbreaks alone and have limited capacity to influence the conditions in surrounding communities. Companies can use the findings to engage with local governments on improving resilience.

• A series of desktop exercises in various international settings raised awareness of how to identify gaps in preparedness and improve coordination of a response to an infectious disease outbreak.

Future activities

Further desktop exercises will illustrate how EID outbreaks can challenge business operations in the extractive industry and will stimulate discussion of how the sector can collaborate with national health systems to build successful response strategies.

The Centre on Global Health Security will also oversee an economic study that will investigate the cost-effectiveness of extractive companies investing in EID control and prevention measures, using mining companies in Ebola-affected countries as a case study.

A literature review will identify the barriers to, and opportunities for, broadening collaborations between the private and public sectors in planning for and responding to emergencies such as an outbreak of infectious disease. The IDRAM pilot study in the DRC found that extractive companies have in the past collaborated with national health systems during health emergencies.

Building on these established partnerships and capturing the experience gained, IDRAM will seek to bring together a cross-section of private and public sector stakeholders to improve communication, understanding and cooperation in preparing for and responding to future EID events and similar health emergencies.