

# Status of Legislation and Factors affecting Disease Surveillance in Nigeria: A qualitative inquiry

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## Objective

Assess the legal framework establishing disease surveillance in Nigeria and identify major factors affecting the performance of the surveillance system.

## Introduction

The outbreak of infectious diseases with a propensity to spread across international boundaries is on an upward rise. Such outbreaks can be devastating with significant associated morbidity and mortality. The recent Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in West Africa which spread to Nigeria is an example(1). Nigeria like several other African countries implements the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) system as its method for achieving the International Health Regulations (IHR). Yet, compliance to the IDSR is questioned. This study seeks to investigate the legal instruments in place and the factors affecting performance of the disease surveillance in the country.

## Methods

The study reports the first objective of a larger study to investigate compliance to disease surveillance by private health providers(2). An investigative search of the literature for legal instruments on disease surveillance in Nigeria was carried out. In addition, key informants were identified and interviewed at the national level and in selected states. The six states in the South-West were identified for an in-depth study. The IHR focal person and the National Health Management Information System officer were interviewed at the national level. The state epidemiologists and the state health management information system (HMIS) officers across the six states were interviewed. Each state has only one state epidemiologist and one HMIS officer as such it was a total sample. In all, 14 key informants were interviewed.

## Results

Six legal instruments were identified as seen in table 1. The most recent comprehensive legal instrument on infectious disease control in Nigeria is a 2005 policy on IDSR. This is further supported by the National Health Act of 2014. However, the National Health Act is not detailed for infectious disease control. The substantive law which governs infectious diseases in Nigeria, the Quarantine Act was enacted almost a century ago during the colonial era in 1926. None of the states studied has an active law on infectious disease surveillance as noted by key informants. While all states refer to the IDSR policy, none has formally ratified the document. There are two independent overlapping data collection systems on infectious diseases: the IDSR and the National Health Management Information System (NHMIS). Data on malaria, HIV and tuberculosis are among data collected across the two systems. This was identified by key informants as a problem since the data collection forms differed across systems and almost always result in differing statistics. In addition, this duplication causes overburdening of frontline workers expected to fill the parallel data collection tools and results in inefficiency of the system. Funding of the surveillance system was identified to be inadequate with significant reliance on international partners.

## Conclusions

A review of the national law on disease surveillance to address emerging global health security challenges is necessary. State legislators need to enact or ratify national laws on infectious disease monitoring and control in their states. The duplication across the NHMIS and the IDSR surveillance system requires harmonization to improve efficiency. Government needs to invest more resources in disease surveillance.

## Legal instruments for disease surveillance in Nigeria

Serial Number	Legal Instrument	Type of Document	Year of Document	Purpose
1	Quarantine Act	Law	1926	The purpose of the law was to "provide for and regulate the imposition of quarantine and to make other provisions for preventing the introduction into and spread in Nigeria, and the transmission from Nigeria, of dangerous infectious diseases
2	National Policy on IDSR in Nigeria	Policy	2005	IDSR was adopted as the means of achieving the IHR in 1998 following a decision reached at a WHO Regional Committee for Africa meeting in Zimbabwe but did not come into effect in Nigeria until 2005. The IDSR policy was developed to guide and provide the necessary environment for the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of an IDSR by all tiers of the government including parastatals, private health sector, non-governmental organizations and partners.
3	Technical Guidelines for IDSR in Nigeria	Guideline to a policy	2013	Technical guideline for the implementation of the IDSR was developed in 2013 and followed the international guidelines released by WHO Regional Office for Africa three years earlier.
4	National Health Act	Law	2014	The National Health Act of 2014 is a health law enacted to strengthen the national health system.
5	National Health Information System Policy	Policy	2014	The National Health Information System Policy (2014) came into being as a revision of the National Health Management Information System Policy of 2007. It was developed to provide guidance for strengthening of the HIS in the country.
6	Bill for an Act to Establish the Nigeria Public Health Act	Bill	2004	The Bill seeks to establish a Public Health Emergency Planning Commission and to repeal the Quarantine Act of 1926

## Keywords

Legislation; Outbreak; Nigeria; Policy; Surveillance

## References

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