

Using evidence on community engagement to increase routine immunisation in Nigeria

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Highlights

Evidence impact

- The state government solidified its strategy to engage the community and increase routine immunisation coverage based on evaluation evidence showing that engaging community leaders and traditional birth attendants increased the acceptability of vaccination interventions.

Factors that contributed to impact

- The research team held discussions with Kebbi state's Primary Health Care Development Agency throughout the formative research duration, taking their inputs and informing them of evaluation findings.
- The formative study findings were timely, coming at a time when Nigeria's national government was consulting with state health agencies to develop the national Community Engagement Strategy that launched in September 2018.

Other details

Title: [Improving vaccination initiation and completion via vaccine indicator and remin...](#)

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Status : Completed May 2019



Context

Nigeria is amongst the 10 countries with the largest number of children who have not completed their recommended immunisations. Whilst routine immunisations have increased, the coverage of later vaccines continues to be low. To encourage caregivers not to miss due dates for immunisation, 3ie supported a pilot of community-based distribution of vaccine indicator and reminder (VIR) bands by Direct Consulting and Logistics Limited, Health Strategy and Delivery Foundation, and Precision Development Research and Advocacy. These low-cost, durable, wearable ankle bands for infants have a built-in reminder system that gives caregivers visual cues for immunisation due dates.

3ie also supported the implementers and an independent researcher from Johns Hopkins University's International Vaccine Access Center to conduct formative evaluation to assess the feasibility, acceptability and relevance of the VIR bands.

Evidence

The authors reported that although vaccination knowledge and intention to vaccinate were high and there were no stated socio-cultural impediments to vaccine uptake, motivation to vaccinate was still low. At endline, only 9 per cent of enrolled children had received their third dose of pentavalent vaccine by 18 weeks. The most commonly cited reasons for under-vaccination

largely pertained to caregiver complacency.

A major setback to the VIR band intervention was the high failure rate of the time-strip indicator, which led to delays in vaccinating many enrolled children. In addition, the limited availability of VIR bands due to import restrictions might have reduced immunisation uptake amongst caregivers who perceived it as an incentive. These issues limited the study team's ability to accurately measure the effectiveness of VIR bands.

Although the bands did not work as expected, evaluation findings indicated that engaging community leaders (traditional and religious leaders) and traditional birth attendants improved the acceptability of interventions to improve routine immunisation uptake in the community.

Evidence impacts

“We have always known that religious leaders are an important stakeholder and people trust them. The VIR band study solidified the evidence, highlighting the role of community leaders in improving acceptability of health interventions.”

Haruna Abdullahi

state cold chain officer

Kebbi State Primary Health Care Development Agency

Informed Kebbi state's approach to improving immunisation

Kebbi state's Accelerated Action for Impact Strategy and its inputs to the national Community Engagement Strategy were informed by the research team's discussions of study findings with the state's Primary Health Care Development Agency. A government official who was part of the study advisory group said the finding that involving community leaders promoted acceptability of health interventions was timely and reaffirmed lessons from other states. The agency plans to involve community leaders, such as village heads, in referring infants to health facilities and tracking defaulters. The agency will also use traditional birth attendants to promote health education on routine immunisation amongst mothers.

As part of the Community Engagement Strategy, traditional birth attendants will be amongst the community volunteers who will inform Mai Ungwas (village heads) of every newborn so they can list the child in their register. Kebbi state has also established a Juma'at Mosque Committee to involve religious leaders (imams and pastors) in raising awareness on routine immunisation during their weekly sermons.

Suggested citation

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 2020. *Using evidence on community engagement to increase routine immunisation in Nigeria* [online summary], Evidence Impact Summaries. New Delhi: 3ie.

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Last updated on 13th November 2020