CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTION TO INCREASING COVERAGE
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Community-based associations have and continue to play a major role in improving the livelihoods of their population, and consequently their health. Complementary to the MoH, they target the most vulnerable and excluded communities through social mobilisation, demand creation and sometimes service delivery activities, to protect children from vaccine preventable diseases who would otherwise remain unvaccinated.

They often do more than focusing only on vaccination as they are using it as a point of entry to tackle other health and non-health related issues, such as nutrition and education, and strengthening access to more services in the view of the Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

This brochure will present you some example of the work done by Civil Society Organizations in increasing vaccination coverage. It will show you that without CSOs we would be leaving serious numbers of children behind, and we will probably risk not meeting the Sustainable Development Goals or the UHC targets.

* basic vaccines are described as three doses of diphtheria-tetanus and pertussis (DTP3)
Appui au Développement et à la Santé Communautaire is a Togolese NGO working to help support and develop community health. It is one of the founding members of the local CSO Platform, POSCVI. In 2013, it developed a community mobilization strategy which they call Papas Champions (Champion Dads), which was implemented in Sokodé, Central Region.

A coordinated strategy was needed as there is a high level of reluctance towards vaccination in Togo, which is largely due to traditional and religious beliefs. To help overcome it, the NGO introduced a program to recruit male community volunteers who could help to change attitudes. They specifically sought to recruit fathers who could help their wives to remember vaccination appointments, accompany them to the clinic when it was time for their children to be vaccinated, or take the children themselves if their wives were unable to do so.

Ten criteria were set for volunteers to meet to be considered as a Champion Dad, on top of which dads had to show a certain level of ethical standards. At the end of the selection process, ten Champion Dads were chosen to help mobilize the wider community.

They volunteered to go on home visits, deliver educational talks and meet with families one-on-one to explain the benefits of immunization. They helped families to remember and keep vaccination appointments and encouraged caregivers, through personal stories, to complete the dosage.

The work of these committed fathers is complementary to the one of community health workers. It has helped families in Sokodé to protect their children from preventable diseases and increased the number of visits made to facilities such as Bon Secours Medical-Social Center. They have also helped to get the message about the importance of immunization out to the wider community.

On top of their community roles, they are also occasionally invited to take part in radio discussions which reach a wider audience, and to supervise teams of community volunteers in running awareness-raising events.
MADAGASCAR:

USING ENTERTAINMENT TO SENSITIZE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF IMMUNIZATION

Traditional songs and dances are a typical part of the Malagasy culture. Therefore, in November 2016, the Malagasy Coalition for the Reinforcement of Health Systems and Immunization (COMARESS) together with the Socio-Sanitary Action Group (ASOS) and with the support of The Global Fund, came up with a brilliant idea to catch people’s attention on the importance of hygiene and immunization. The approach called “Amuse to Educate” used giant puppets to deliver essential messages such as children’s rights to be healthy and immunized, combining traditions with creativeness, as well as the importance of vaccination to prevent diseases. The stories that were entertaining for both children and adults were followed up with popular dances.

Replicated during several manifestations and in multiple regions, the messages were then translated into the 12 different local dialects and adapted to the campaigns’ theme.

At first, the organizations weren’t sure if the concept would work. However, when they used it during the malaria epidemic, it remarkably contributed to the control of the plague.

This playful approach initially meant to sensitize people on hygiene and vaccination, is now also proven to be one of the most efficient ways to communicate information on immunization services. During some campaigns, the puppets can be part of a more significant act including other street theater demonstrations, showcasing, for instance, parents going to the health center with their children to get them vaccinated.

Yet, what communities await the most throughout these events is the performance of their national immunization Champion, Black Nadia. Singing and dancing on contemporary rhythms, Black Nadia’s song “Vaccination,” now broadcasted on TV, emphasizes on the seriousness of immunization.

COMARESS, together with key partners, found an inventive and amusing manner to encouraged parents to vaccinate their children very young; not only to help their country tackle diseases but also to give the next generation the chance of a better future.
According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about three million children under the age of five die each year in Africa. These deaths are related to the fact that one in five children do not receive vaccines, mainly because of the shortage of services in remote areas.

This tragic situation encouraged the young Burkinabé engineer, Christian Cédric Toé, to develop in 2017 “Laafi Bag”: a portable cooling device powered by solar energy designed to keep vaccines at the right temperature for almost four days (90 hours), without interrupting the cold chain.

“This issue was very important to me. When vaccines are not stored in ideal temperature conditions, they become like jars of water. And when you inject the produce in children, they do not have a protective role anymore” said Christian Toé to BBC.

His innovation, enabling the transportation and storage of vaccines and other sensitive medical products without interruption of the cold chain, will help many health workers vaccinate children living in the most critical areas in Africa. “Laafi Bag” has been created to meet the standards recommended by WHO and is still in the approval process. While reducing the impact of the human factor and temperature swings during the transport of pharmaceuticals, Christian Cedric’s concept could save millions of lives in Africa’s most remote and hard-to-reach areas.
On June 4th, 2017, the Health NGOs Network (HENNET), with the support of the Ministry of Health (MoH), conducted “Immunization Sunday” in Kajiado County, Kenya to increase the knowledge and acceptance of immunization among religious leaders and community gatekeepers.

The sensitization meeting was aiming to encourage religious leaders to use their influence to accelerate routine immunization in the communities they serve. The name “Immunization Sunday” came following the enthusiastic response of religious leaders, who organized a day exclusively around immunization, immediately after meeting with HENNET members.

In preparation, five community health volunteers sensitized the population to the upcoming activity. Nearby communities embraced the initiative, bringing their children for the occasion.

Even though it was being held at a Christian church, an Imam from a local mosque also attended and spoke to the Christian congregants on the importance of immunization, and on how all religious leaders should embrace vaccination services. He reminded the congregation that “prevention is better than cure.”

The different religious leaders shared messages on the importance of routine immunization and the need for community ownership of child health. The unity shown between different religious groups during the activity drove home the message on the importance of immunization. The service was followed by a health session near the church, which resulted in 299 under five children under being vaccinated, receiving de-worming treatment and having access to other curative treatments.

“Immunization Sunday” brought together some stakeholders from different local health departments, resulting in an integrated approach to service delivery that included HENNET support. Also, the close relationship between religious leaders and community gatekeepers in Kajiado County has made it easier for HENNET to work within the local communities, and to understand the dynamics that often derail health-seeking behaviors.

Immunization Sunday demonstrated that the involvement of stakeholders along with the influence of local leaders could accelerate community ownership of child health services. It also showed that health facility hours may not be convenient for all and that using other institutions as service points can help to improve access to, and demand for, routine immunization services.
Sadaf and Khalil are two of REEDS 52 dedicated frontline health volunteers who are at the heart of efforts to keep every child vaccinated in Union Council 178/7R, Liaqat Pur.
Rural Education and Economic Development Society (REEDS) is an established network of health volunteers in Liaqat Pur, Pakistan who support the district outreach program in the hardest to reach areas. Sadaf Khalil and Khalil Masih are two volunteer vaccinators who work with REEDS to raise community awareness of health services and vaccination campaigns. All REEDS volunteers are working towards the same goal – to ensure every child is vaccinated.

Sadaf and Khalil, are parents of three children, and have been health volunteers for the last two years. They fit their work with REEDS around childcare and the usual hustle and bustle of family life. Some of their core duties include talking to other parents to address their concerns about vaccination, identifying children who have not been vaccinated, and overseeing the success of vaccination campaigns. “We enjoy serving our people. And as parents, it’s our duty to protect all children from diseases”, says Khalil.

The Pakistan Polio Eradication Programme has come a long way towards building a future in which polio no longer endangers children, families, and communities. Pakistan is still polio endemic but cases have dropped from 306 in 2014 to just 8 cases in 2017. Unfortunately, campaigns were not reaching all children – with some areas reporting that 35% of children had been missed. Vaccination teams would go door to door, “but without any avail due to parents’ indifferent attitude, and farm activities.” REEDS local team volunteers and social mobilization have been working in this area to support Immunization awareness activities, and alongside leadership from the Government Health Department, there has been a huge increase in the number of parents taking interest in their vaccines.

Sadaf and Khalil emphasize the importance of training and being properly prepared for working within the local community. “Illiterate parents usually have many questions and if volunteers cannot answer even one, the chances that they refuse to vaccinate their children increase,” says Khalil.

Before immunization campaigns begin, REEDS health volunteers, including Sadaf and Khalil, gather at BHU for training and planning sessions – the District Health Authorities and REEDS organize these jointly. Volunteers discuss and learn about how to talk to parents about the importance of vaccination, as well as how to successfully respond to the many tough questions or situations they may encounter. After training, the volunteers go to their target villages, and are driven around announcing the upcoming polio and measles campaign. This is done through mosque announcements and, when necessary, through door-to-door actions.

“We generally don’t face any problems during campaigns; as most families are familiar with the importance of vaccination thanks to our Immunization mobilization campaigns, and want to vaccinate their children. If families are hesitant, we try to encourage them by informing them on the benefits of the vaccine. If they still reject the vaccine, we ask our supervisors to come and help convince them. I have never met a family who refused the vaccine in the end,” Sadaf says.

Largely thanks to the REEDS health volunteer and polio vaccinators who have, each month, provided door-to-door as well as public immunization services, many more children in Union Council 178-7R are vaccinated.
The objective of the OCV campaign was to administer a two-schedule of inactivated Euvichol-plus vaccine to all individuals, aged one-year-old and above, in the four sub-districts of Lusaka.

The operation was successfully implemented in the targeted communities with a fantastic response rate from the communities. Information about the epidemic, along with medical care, were given in permanent locations such as schools, churches, people’s workplaces, and in health centers. Outreach services were provided to the far-out groups to ensure that everyone had access to the vaccine.

Nevertheless, a few challenges were faced during the various phases of the emergency campaign, including the limited funding for demand creation activities, which didn’t stop ZCSIP to get involved and manage the community mobilization activities through its local members. Moreover, as the outbreak hit over Christmas break, few CSOs were available to participate. CHAZ’ Secretariat then took over and engaged in all projects.

At the close of the first round of the campaign, a 107% coverage rate was recorded in the targeted four sub-districts. The objective number was reached thanks to the commitment of all stakeholders, working as a team in response to the outbreak.
Zambia Civil Society Immunization Platform (ZCSIP) was formed in 2014 as a coordinator for Civil Society Organizations’ (CSOs) contributions to the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), with a purpose to contribute to the Zambian government’s efforts of improving and sustaining immunization coverage.

In 2014, Churches Health Association of Zambia (CHAZ) became, through Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and with support from the Gavi CSO Constituency, the Facilitating CSO for immunization in Zambia.

The Platform is part of the EPI technical working group (TWG) at the Ministry of Health (MoH) and contributes to the success of the EPI in Zambia. Through the mobilization of members in 22 districts, it aimed to create demand for immunization through capacity building and financial support.
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