



Success story

Data provokes traditional ruler, boosts polio immunizations



In settlements like Birnin-Magaji where births are not documented, measuring to see whether the right hand touches the left ear is an age old method of determining that a child is six years old during immunization exercises
Photo: Lola Mabogunje, COMPASS

The people of Birnin-Magaji, a rural local government area in Zamfara state in northern Nigeria, are mainly farmers, traders, and herders. The population is highly mobile to meet the demands of daily living. This raises the risk of transmissible diseases such as polio which can leave children with permanent disability, especially those who have not received the required doses of vaccines.

Despite several rounds of nationwide immunizations, Nigeria remains a center of transmission for the wild polio virus. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 1100 cases of wild polio were diagnosed in Nigeria in 2006. Among several issues compounding the problem is the challenge of collecting and verifying data to plan interventions and recognize and build on achievements. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contributes to the eradication of polio by reviewing and analyzing data from each immunization round and supporting communities, providers and government authorities in identifying emerging priorities and taking action.

Following an analysis of the polio situation, USAID disseminated the findings to Alhaji Mustafa Dan Ali, the Emir of Birnin-Magaji. According to the data, the local government area ranked high for polio transmission with six new wild polio virus cases in 2006 and no significant improvement in 2007. Based on this information, the enlightened Alhaji Dan Ali swung into action by holding meetings with all district heads and charging them to monitor the immunization activities of primary health centers; he also held a similar meeting with all health facility heads, encouraging them to be committed to their work.

The Emir also facilitated the supply of cold chain materials, critical for the storage and transport of the polio vaccine; and introduced emirate birth certificates to complement efforts of traditional birth attendants in tracking and referring newborns for vaccination. To launch the 2007 immunization activities, a flag off ceremony was organized at the Emir's palace where ward heads and religious leaders were urged to hold sensitization meetings and repeat mosque announcements on the benefits of immunization.

As a result of the Emir's involvement, the 2007 Immunization Plus Days recorded a remarkable 93% immunization coverage in Birnin-Magaji local government area.

Launched in 2005, the USAID funded Community Participation for Action in the Social Sector (COMPASS) Polio program strengthens polio immunization activities by mobilizing communities, improving vaccination coverage and management, and overseeing the monitoring and evaluation of all immunization efforts, in collaboration with the Nigerian National Polio Eradication Initiative. USAID's polio eradication work takes place in the Federal Capital Territory and ten other states: Bauchi, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Lagos, Nasarawa, Sokoto and Zamfara.

