



Credit: Bethlehem Asgedew/Conc Group Polio Project

#### Key Result

USAID reached more than 925,000 children with polio vaccinations and, by linking pregnancy registration with newborn tracking systems, reached 15,000 newborns missed with initial vaccination in Ethiopia.

## An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure: Volunteers in Ethiopia are Strengthening Routine Immunization in Hard-to-Reach Communities

Ubah is a mother of three in the Somali region in Ethiopia. Her family, like many others in the dry, sparsely-populated region, earns a living by raising livestock and lives far from health facilities. To help educate remote communities about the importance of immunization to prevent deadly childhood diseases, as well as other basic health information, USAID worked with Ethiopia's Ministry of Health and the Somali Regional Health Bureau to train community health volunteers.

Ubah's brother was trained as a community volunteer and taught her about the importance of vaccination. He, along with other community volunteers, identifies symptoms of vaccine-preventable diseases and identifies vaccine defaulters to get them back on the routine schedule. Ubah previously didn't know about polio or other vaccine-preventable diseases, but now she understands how immunizations protect children from diseases such as polio and measles. She reflected, "Unimmunized children are at risk and can be paralyzed. I now advise people to vaccinate their children and protect them from illness." Ubah's older daughters, aged six and four, had initially missed some vaccinations, but are now fully vaccinated, healthy, and attend elementary school. Ubah follows the vaccination schedule for her six-month-old son and proudly keeps his vaccination card at home.

Since 1998, USAID has invested over \$17 million dollars to non-governmental organizations to eradicate polio in a manner that strengthens routine immunization and community-based integrated disease surveillance in regions like Ubah's in Ethiopia. This investment has resulted in a cohort of over 11,000 community health volunteers that have helped eliminate polio in Ethiopia and now serve as critical links to immunization in hard-to-reach areas, such as Somali, and with mobile, cross-border populations. They help identify and track symptoms of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as paralysis due to polio, which are often an indication of pockets of poor vaccination coverage. Volunteers also connect communities to health facilities for routine immunizations and identify children who are behind schedule.

USAID's efforts to strengthen the surveillance systems enable outbreaks to be identified and mitigated quickly and improve the resilience of the health system. By strengthening in-country capacity to deliver immunizations in remote communities, USAID partners with countries like Ethiopia on their Journey to Self-Reliance.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

[WWW.USAID.GOV/ACTINGONTHECALL](http://WWW.USAID.GOV/ACTINGONTHECALL)