

Engaging Community Leaders to Boost COVID-19 Vaccination in Ghana

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INTRO AND OBJECTIVE

To address vaccine hesitancy in Ghana's Western, Western North, and Ahafo Regions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the USAID Strengthening the Care Continuum Project, implemented by JSI, in collaboration with the Ghana Health Service (GHS) and local civil society organizations, applied a social behavior change strategy that boosted vaccine uptake, and ultimately helped improve health outcomes.

METHODS

- The project trained and mobilized over 500 influential community members termed "myth busters" from diverse backgrounds in the three regions to disseminate accurate and timely information about COVID-19 vaccines.
- These myth busters utilized approved materials from the GHS and World Health Organization to engage communities where they live and work, including markets, schools, and homes.
- Targeting marginalized groups, the initiative ensured equitable access to vaccination services, mobilizing individuals aged 15 years and above, pregnant women, people living with HIV, people with disabilities, and migrant populations.

RESULTS

- As of April 22, 2024, 217,024 doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Ghana's Ahafo Region and 834,535 doses in the Western North Region.
- Likewise, 57.1% of the target population in the Ahafo Region has been fully vaccinated and 62.3% in the Western North Region. The success of the myth busters approach highlighted the influential role of community leaders in promoting vaccine acceptance and debunking misinformation.
- By engaging trusted figures within communities and targeting marginalized populations, the project achieved increased vaccine acceptance and enhanced inclusivity in health care access.

Myth busters: Shattering vaccine doubts, building community trust.



A myth buster and operator of a community information center making announcement on the need for COVID-19 vaccination. Credit: Richard Adupong, JSI.

CONCLUSIONS

The myth busters proved effective in addressing vaccine hesitancy in the three regions. Future efforts should focus on expanding the use of influential community figures as myth busters in other regions, and simultaneously implement targeted campaigns to address specific concerns or misconceptions. This further promotes vaccine awareness, acceptance, and uptake, particularly in the face of emerging emergencies or pandemics.

