

Vaccine Ambassadors: Leveraging Trusted Community Leaders to Increase Vaccine Acceptance in Liberia

Lindsey Leslie
SBC Advisor
Breakthrough ACTION Liberia



COVID-19 in Liberia: A Timeline

- **March 2020:** Liberia confirmed its first COVID-19 case
- **September 2020:** Liberia experiences 2nd wave of COVID-19
- **March 2021:** Liberia received its first COVID-19 vaccine shipment.
- **April 2021:** Liberia administers its first dose
- **May 2021:** Liberia experiences 3rd wave of COVID-19
- **January 2022:** Liberia experiences 4th wave of COVID-19
- **February 2022:** COVID-19 vaccine coverage was abysmally low at 21%.



Community member receives COVID-19 vaccine during mobile vaccination campaign

COVID-19 Vaccination in Liberia: Our Work

- **Designed COVID-19 Vaccine SBC materials**
 - We designed banners, posters, Facebook posts, radio spots, stickers, etc. We translated materials into local languages.
- **Provided Technical Support on Public Awareness Efforts**
 - We supported several rounds of community mobilization campaigns. Currently we are coordinating a nationwide song competition focused on youth.
- **Piloted the Use of Incentives to Generate Community Demand for COVID-19 Vaccines**
- **Strengthened Rumor Monitoring Systems**
 - Especially among media professionals, malaria focal persons, and county based teams to ensure rumors are properly reported, recorded, and addressed.
- **Strengthened capacity to use integrated community SBC approaches**
 - Especially among community radio stations, street theater troupes and county based teams
- **Trained Influential Leaders to Address Vaccine Hesitancy**
 - We supported Vaccine Ambassadors and Trusted Messengers to mobilize community members, especially in hard-to-reach areas.



Grand Gedeh County Health Team member distributes posters

Leveraging Local Leadership

- Breakthrough ACTION Liberia worked with influential leaders from the community, district and county level.
 - To build trust and enthusiasm for the COVID-19 vaccine
 - To create awareness on vaccine type, availability
 - To share COVID-19 preventative practices
- **Round 1: Oct 2021- Jan 2022**
 - Initially, a group of 180 influential leaders from within the subnational health sector from six counties (Maryland, Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Kru, River Gee and Grand Gedeh)
- **Round 2: June- Oct 2022**
 - An additional 60 influential leaders were added to the original group from four counties (Grand Cape Mount, Grand Kru, River Gee and Grand Gedeh)

Leveraging Local Leadership

Selection Criteria:

- Recognized as influential leaders in their respective communities, churches, mosques, women and youth organizations and local government authority
- Willing to engage community members about COVID-19
- Vaccinated (preferably fully vaccinated)

COVID-19 Orientation: Key Topics

Breakthrough ACTION co-facilitated a one-day orientation for the influential leaders which included:

- Information on the COVID-19 disease and preventative behaviors
- An overview of COVID-19 vaccines
- Tips for effective interpersonal communication and counseling approaches to address vaccine concerns
- Strategies for rumor management
- A review of available SBC materials and job aids (e.g talking points, posters, testimonies, monitoring form)



Maryland County Health Team
co-facilitates orientation session

COVID-19 Orientation: Key Activities

As final components of the training, participants:

- Engaged in role play to practice IPCC tips and use of SBC materials
- Developed an action plan outlining the community engagement events they would carry out post-orientation



Participants develop action plan

Motivation and Recognition

An influential leader would be named a “vaccine ambassador” if they completed and documented at least three engagement events within a specified time period.

Everyone who completed the required number of community engagement sessions were publicly recognized as vaccine ambassadors

They were awarded a certificate and appeared on talk shows to share their personal testimonials.

Vaccine Ambassadors did not receive financial incentives.



Vaccine Ambassadors share testimonials on a community radio station



Grand Kru County Health Officer recognizes a Vaccine Ambassador

Results from Vaccine Ambassadors

October 2021- February 2022, 86 Vaccine Ambassadors conducted 425 community engagement events, which resulted in 1,788 additional people getting vaccinated.



Bomi District Health Team distributes certificates to Vaccine Ambassadors

New Updates! (since abstract submission)

- **Additional engagement:** October- November 2022, 31 active Vaccine Ambassadors conducted 2,018 community engagement events in 4 counties, which resulted in an additional 330 people getting vaccinated in hard to reach communities
- **Concept evolution:** The Vaccine Ambassadors concept was adapted to include additional influential leaders (beyond health).
 - As of Dec. 2022, Trusted Messengers conducted a total of 2,911 community engagement events in 4 counties, which resulted in 478 additional people getting vaccinated in hard to reach communities
- **Liberia exceeds 70%:** As of Nov 2022, Liberia reports 75% having completed the primary vaccination series.
- **Refocus on routine immunization:** Liberia is now devising strategies to integrate COVID-19 vaccination into routine immunization.



COVID-19 poster distribution

Lessons Learned

Our work coaching, supporting and recognizing Vaccine Ambassadors in Liberia illustrates the promise of similar grassroots interventions in other countries that are struggling to build vaccine acceptance, including increasing trust and acceptance for previously accepted routine immunization.

Key Lessons

- Integrate respected and well-known community figures-especially local health workers- in interventions designed to build vaccine acceptance as it ensures cultural and contextual relevance of community leaders in creating demand for COVID vaccine as trusted sources.
- Encourage dialogue— especially sharing of personal experiences— between community members and health workers to spark action.
- Look beyond financial incentives- for increased trust, authenticity, and sustainability. Leveraging public recognition, pride (in one's work), community accountability and continued monitoring were key to this activity.

Thank you!

Presentation Slides:

TINYURL.com/SBCCSummit-VaccineAmbassadors



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

