

IMPROVING COMMUNITY HEALTH: A CORE GROUP POLIO (PARTNERS) PROJECT* MODEL THAT WORKS

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Making her way through the dusty Bankamawa settlement, CORE Group Partners Project (CGPP) Volunteer Community Mobilizer (VCM) Binta Ahmad stops momentarily to check her neatly kept community register. Before entering the next compound for a household visit, she consults the book to find the immunization status of Safiya Saidu's three youngest children – ages 2 months, 3 years and 5 years. Each row in the register contains the names of the family's five children, including two older siblings who have already completed their series of routine immunization (RI).

Ms. Ahmad quickly confirms that the trio of under five's are up to date with their polio and other routine immunizations. When she steps into the home, she is quick to praise Safiya for keeping her children protected from vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs). She engages with the mother for several more minutes, pointing to her illustrated flipbook containing health education and promotion messages to share with Safiya.

For the past two years, Ms. Ahmad has worked as a CGPP-trained VCM in Northern Nigeria's Kano State. Previously, she worked as a VCM under UNICEF, also in the Rimin Gado Local Government Area (LGA), for six years. The 25-year-old mother of six children is among the 2,200 all-female CGPP VCMs who work tirelessly in the high-risk (HR) areas for polio transmission in Kano, Borno, Yobe, Kaduna and Katsina states.

Ms. Ahmad, who began her volunteer work at the age of 17, and the other CGPP VCMs have made a profound difference: they are part of an army of volunteers working across the polio HR states by moving the country to the brink of polio eradication and contributing an important chapter to a global health success story.



Wearing a CGPP-branded pink hijab, VCM Binta Ahmad, who works in Kano State's Rimin Gado LGA, visits with mother Amina Usman, who is holding 43-day-old Khadijah Hussain. Binta, 25, is a mother of six children and has been a CGPP VCM for two years.

Photo Credit: Lydia Bologna, CGPP



Mother Safiya Saidu with 2-month-old Sadiya Sallau and 3-year-old daughter. (The older children hid behind a curtain during a recent visit.)

Photo Credit: Lydia Bologna, CGPP

births, and track defaulters and link them to health facilities for follow-up. These VCMs have become the face of community health in the settlements and localities where they live and are a testament to the successful model of CGPP work.

*In Nigeria, the CORE Group Polio Project is known as the CORE Group Partners Project due to the sensitivity of the word “polio” in some resistant communities.

Right: Children of Bankamawa Settlement pose for a photograph.

Photo Credit: Lydia Bologna



Nigeria is one of three polio endemic nations in the world (alongside Pakistan and Afghanistan) and the only country in Africa with Wild Polio Virus (WPV). The country has made dramatic progress in the last several years by shifting from the country with the highest number of WPV cases globally in 2012 (122) to four cases reported in 2016. The World Health Organization (WHO) could certify the country WPV-free sometime in 2020. Nigeria is currently battling several circulating Vaccine-Derived Polio Virus type 2 (cVDPV2) outbreaks, highlighting sub-optimal coverage for routine immunization, particularly Inactivated Polio Virus (IPV).

CGPP/Nigeria joined the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) efforts in 2013. The CGPP-supported VCMs like Ms. Ahmad are selected from their local communities and trained and supervised by the CGPP and partnering community-based organizations. VCMs are assigned households in their communities, regularly visit with families to discuss the importance of polio and other routine immunizations, as well as record child immunization, track pregnant women, register