COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS (CAGS)
AN INSTRUMENT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND ADDRESSING STIGMA DUE TO COVID-19

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS CREATED A DEVASTATING IMPACT ON HEALTH SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES.

• Ignorance and misinformation led to stigmatization of individuals and families
• Social boycotting
• Loss of livelihood
• Inability to access essential services
• Resulting in people avoiding testing, treatment and quarantine facilities.

The CORE Group through Social Mobilization Network (SMNet) are working for polio eradication by mobilizing communities to participate in polio campaigns and avail routine immunization services.
Formation of Community Action Groups (CAGs)

A vast network of ‘community influencers’ was created over the past two decades by the CGPP staff working for polio eradication, to support health workers in community mobilization for immunization, especially for polio campaigns and routine immunization.

2 million children missed immunization and stigma restricted people from seeking COVID care

These influencers were formed into local groups (CAGs) to promote immunization and combat fear and stigma related to COVID-19.
THE GROUP SIZE AND TRAINING

In a normal situation, each group is made up of around 10-15 people who come together to help families/members in their communities.

But in a pandemic or emergency such as COVID-19, the group is made up of just 4-5 members who work together and act timely.

Each member was trained by the project staff virtually or in person on immunization and COVID-19 key messages.

Leaflet on immunization

Leaflet on stigma
CAG MEETINGS

CAGs meet regularly, identify COVID-affected families needing support and then develop a plan to carry out the following tasks/responsibilities:

• Special emphasis on childhood immunization (As sessions were disrupted during lockdowns) motivating parents for immunization.

• Dispensing critical information on prevention of disease, especially COVID, including addressing stigma issues.

• Supporting COVID-affected person/family in accessing health services as well as arranging for essential supplies at their doorstep.

A social innovation as volunteer efforts of community are institutionalized as ‘CAGs’ with definite operational guidelines and objectives.
EFFECT

• CAG members helped communities to dispel myths, clarify doubts and concerns

• Assisted over 3,800 COVID-affected families in accessing food and health care services.

This initiative can be adapted to other health programs especially to promote vaccine appropriate behaviors and vaccine hesitancy