Investment in polio eradication redeemed dividend in COVID-19 pandemic response - Lessons from CORE Group Polio Project India

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Background: Globally, polio eradication initiative has created a vast network of public health professionals for disease surveillance, cold chain, laboratories, community mobilizers, and local influencers. Across the globe, polio assets were deployed to respond to the pandemic. In India, the WHO’s polio network supported surveillance and contact tracing. The CGPP, drawing from its core community engagement strengths and existing community-level assets (e.g., a network of community mobilizers and influencers), also responded by building confidence among community members to deal with the pandemic.

Methods: We reviewed CGPP India’s COVID-19 response and its immediate outputs using the information available in project administrative records and reports (e.g., meeting notes, training reports, and weekly updates).

Results/Outcomes:

CGPP designed a local context-specific dynamic risk communication package

Engaged about 5000 community influencers and formed 800 Community Action Groups

In the first phase of pre-vaccine, the CGPP reached about 7,000 families, including 1,935 suspected or confirmed cases

CGPP Re-deployed and trained 700 community volunteers

Supported Health workers in identification, counseling, and treatment and addressing stigma

As vaccination against COVID-19 began, CGPP could address rumors and misconceptions in the target community through various SBCC activities.

Conclusion: An investment in polio eradication gave benefits far beyond it. It is an investment for a strong health system ready for emergency response that could be the need of time, and continued strengthening of polio eradication infrastructure will help countries develop systems and be prepared.

By July 2022, vaccination coverage among 18+ population reached to 97% in CGPP areas.
Barriers and enablers of the world’s largest COVID-19 vaccination program
A Case study of India

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Background: India launched the world’s largest COVID vaccination program in Jan. 2021 with targets of 300 million. Subsequently, the target group was expanded to include all 18+ age population, followed by children in the age group of 15-18 years, 12-15 and 05-12 years. By April 2022, 1,886,120,131 doses had been administered. This phenomenal journey was not without challenges. But strong enablers helped to mitigate every barrier. In this study, we listed the barriers and enablers of this success.

Methods: We reviewed available literature- media reports, journal articles, and government guidelines.

Conclusion: Government’s will and ownership, strong health systems, locally available vaccines, and effective communication strategies helped India vaccinate a billion people in less than two years period. These learnings will be helpful not only for low & middle-income countries but some developed countries still struggling to vaccinate a reasonable proportion of their population.