Tackling gender imbalance in COVID vaccination: CORE Group Polio Project India’s experience

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Learning Outcome

Describe the CORE Group Polio Project’s (CGPP) strategies and interventions that helped in addressing gender imbalance and accelerating COVID vaccination coverage in hard-to-reach areas of India.
The Context

India launched the world’s largest COVID vaccination program in Jan. 2021 with targets of 300 million. Subsequently, the target group was expanded.

India’s COVID vaccination program experienced differential coverage by place, race, and gender in its initial days.
The USAID-supported CORE Group Polio Project (CGPP) in India used its two decade’s community engagement experience to promote COVID-Appropriate Behaviors (CABs) and COVID vaccination in 15 selected districts from Assam, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh states.

The intervention reached about **3.5 million** population, including **2.1 million** (18+ years and above) vaccine-eligible people.
Methods

- Used **CGPP India’s administrative data** primarily collected for project management from November 2021 to March 2022.
- Performed a **gender-specific trend analysis** of COVID-19 vaccination coverage.
- Reviewed the processes that CCPP applied to accelerate vaccination coverage.
Baseline level of vaccine hesitancy and eagerness in CGPPs 15 districts, July-August 2021

Percent respondents:

- Immediately (within a month) went for registration or vaccination: 15.0%
- Waited for a month or more to go for registration or vaccination: 37.8%
- Eligible but yet to take a decision on whether or not to receive the vaccine: 47.2%
- Never wanted and won't take the vaccine at all: 10.8%

(n=1065)

First dose recipients’ eagerness to take the second dose (n=367)

- Will take when it is due: 44.1%
- Too eager to take the second dose: 41.9%
- Not too keen to take the second dose: 7.7%
- Not in a rush, I have other priorities to fulfil: 6.2%

Source: CGPP India’s cluster survey, July-August 2021

When the intervention began, a small proportion of the eligible population was vaccinated with COVID vaccination, and a substantial proportion was hesitant to take COVID vaccination.
COVID Vaccination Status, CGPP U.P. areas, July 2021

By religion and gender

Vaccination coverage differed between males and females and by religion. Vaccine update significantly differed between Muslim men and women.
Stated reasons for no vaccination, CGPP UP districts, July 2021 (n=355)

### Percent respondents’ statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to get time away from work</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No vaccine or appointment available in the nearby center</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty travelling to a vaccination site</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members did not allow to take the vaccine</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one available in family to provide childcare</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available appointment time did not work for me</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not have the required documents</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to take the vaccine</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Why the respondents did not want to take the vaccine (n=43)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afraid of side effects of the vaccine</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t think the vaccine can protect me</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have strong immunity; Do not need the vaccination</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one in my group/network is taking the vaccine</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor advised me to not take the vaccine</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My religious leader will not approve my taking the vaccine</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get the type of vaccine I wanted</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CGPP India’s cluster survey, July-August 2021
Rumors Doing The Round, July-August 2021

• Around 23.5% of respondents stated that in the last 7 days, they have **heard negative stories discouraging** them from taking COVID-19 vaccines

• Most of them shared that the message revolves around the fact that **once a vaccine is taken, death will occur within the next two years**

• Vaccinated people will turn **sterile**

• Vaccinated people will get **high fever**.

• Vaccinated people **develop severe allergies**

Friends (54%) and relatives (19%) were the most common sources of these stories. Next best common source was WhatsApp. About 40% respondents who were exposed to such stories, also believed them.
Interventions

CGPP India’s COVID-19 response interventions (July 2021 to July 2022)

CGPP designed a local context-specific risk communication package

CGPP Re-deployed and trained 700 community volunteers

Engaged about 5000 community influencers and formed 800 Community Action Groups

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

CGPP India functionaries performed the following activities to identify defaulters, bridge the gender gap and improve vaccination coverage:

- Tracked vaccination status of each eligible person
- Assessed person/family-specific causes of no vaccination/vaccine hesitancy
Interventions

...activities to bridge the gender gap and improve vaccination coverage:

• Mid-media drives disseminating messages related to vaccination’s importance
Interventions

...activities to bridge the gender gap and improve vaccination coverage:

• Personalized communication with vaccine-hesitant population and family heads
Interventions

...activities to bridge the gender gap and improve vaccination coverage:

• Engaged religious leaders to motivate community members having faith-related issues with vaccination

• Engaged local lady influencers to motivate the unvaccinated female population
Interventions

...activities to bridge the gender gap and improve vaccination coverage:

• Assisted in arranging vaccination sessions in each community, particularly female vaccination posts
The interventions contributed to the significant increase in COVID-19 vaccination coverage, and the gender gap in CGPP India’s catchment area has significantly reduced (First dose: From 20.2% points [Nov. 21] to -0.1% points [Jul. 22]; Second dose: From 9.6.2% points [Nov. 21] to 0.2% points [Jul. 22]).

Data source: CGPP CMs’ records (UP and Assam) and government records for Nuh, Haryana
Results

COVID-19 vaccination coverage, CGPP areas (15 districts)
Data as of 31st July 2022

18+ years population
- 1st dose, 97%
- 2nd dose, 75%

15-17 years population
- 1st dose, 70%
- 2nd dose, 45%

12-14 years population
- 1st dose, 49%
- 2nd dose, 33%

60+ years population
- Prec. Dose, 16%
Conclusion

• Engaging female mobilizers and influencers is crucial while dealing with gender inequalities

• Rumor and vaccination-defaulters tracking mechanisms help address vaccine hesitancy, narrow down the gender gap, and improve vaccination coverage.

Thank you!