Tuning in and changing lives

Using media to increase demand for and reduce barriers to childhood immunisation in Northern Nigeria

January 2018
Understanding and engaging with audiences and communities, working with local media, producing creative broadcast content, and monitoring and assessing has helped the effort to eradicate the wild poliovirus and increase routine immunisation across Northern Nigeria.
• BBC Media Action audiences are more likely to discuss polio with others, know more about how it is transmitted and prevented, and take action following vaccinator visits than non-audiences.

• Evidence suggests that radio interventions are helping debunk harmful myths around the polio vaccine, and that the Madubi radio drama is being used as a tool to challenge vaccine refusal within families and beyond.

• BBC Media Action’s work has helped sustain public engagement in polio. While discussion about polio reduced over time for non-audiences, polio remained a higher priority for families who listened to or watched UNICEF-funded BBC Media Action content in Nigeria.

• In North East Nigeria, Madubi Live Community Outreach events are making the mobilisation work of community leaders and vaccination teams easier.
The situation

**Polio:** Nigeria is one of only three countries that remain polio-endemic, and the only one in Africa. Although global cases have decreased by 99%, the last 1% of cases poses a grave threat. Polio is highly infectious and spreads rapidly among non-immunised populations\(^1\), and can lead to permanent paralysis or death\(^2\).

In Northern Nigeria, polio vaccination efforts have traditionally been met with parental and community resistance, meaning some parents refuse to have their children vaccinated, or fail to bring them for vaccination if their children are not reached at home during vaccination campaigns.

The presence of polio in North East Nigeria is especially challenging. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Crises (UNOCHA), since 2009 violence and conflict in the North East has led to a loss of over 20,000 lives. In Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, of an estimated 7 million people in need of humanitarian aid, 50% are children. In this context, polio vaccination is often not seen as a priority.

**Childhood immunisation:** In 2010, it was estimated that vaccine preventable diseases killed over 200,000 Nigerian children each year\(^3\). Whilst the proportion of children vaccinated has increased since then, it is still not high enough and children continue to suffer serious complications and die due to these infections. Consistent and widespread immunisation, therefore, is a key part of reducing childhood deaths in Nigeria.

The response

In 2014, understanding that mass media as well as community-based outreach are important in overcoming personal and social barriers to vaccine uptake, UNICEF began funding BBC Media Action to implement the Media Engagement for Supporting Demand Creation for Childhood Immunisation (MERCI) Project.

The project uses a multi-media approach – radio, TV, social media and community outreach – to address socio-cultural norms and beliefs acting as barriers to behaviour change amongst caregivers. Activities

---


\(^2\) Centre for Disease Control, (July 2017) [https://www.cdc.gov/polio/about/](https://www.cdc.gov/polio/about/)

\(^3\) [http://childsurvivalnetwork.info/resources/Immunisations+Factsheet.pdf](http://childsurvivalnetwork.info/resources/Immunisations+Factsheet.pdf)
provide information for hard-to-reach and particularly vulnerable audiences, encourage communal discussion around polio vaccination and routine immunisation, foster positive attitudes towards immunisations and vaccinators, and counter misinformation being disseminated among populations in Northern Nigeria.

The first two years of the MERCI project focused on increasing demand for vaccination, particularly polio vaccination, in areas of North West Nigeria that were particularly high risk due to low levels of vaccination uptake for children under-5 years old. However, after new cases of acute flaccid paralysis due to polio were recorded in North East Nigeria in 2016, project activities expanded to address the outbreak and consequent issues arising in the complex and dynamic context in North East Nigeria.

Activities

Under the MERCI Project, BBC Media Action works with local Nigerian radio and TV stations, community, traditional and religious leaders, local film and music stars, diverse populations of Nigerians, medical experts, and UNICEF staff to bring tailored media content addressing issues around polio vaccination and routine immunisation to audiences across Northern Nigeria.

All media content is produced in Nigeria, is informed by BBC Media Action’s proven health communication approach, and uses research to ensure programming engages and resonates with audiences. Local languages, accents, faces, stories, characters and settings ensure that content feels credible, is trusted, and is taken into audience’s hearts.

- **Radio drama:** *Madubi* (The Mirror) is a 15-minute, Hausa-language radio drama broadcast on 44 stations across Northern Nigeria. *Madubi* tackles polio vaccination, routine immunisation, and other family health issues in fictionalised settings in North West and
North East Nigeria, and appeals to audiences by integrating characters, issues, challenges and storylines that reflect socio-cultural values and belief systems of different communities and ethnic groups across the North.

• **Community outreach:** *Madubi Live Community Outreach* events bring entire communities together to watch live enactments of scenes from *Madubi* and take part in discussions around the polio, vaccination and childcare storylines – helping further challenge misunderstandings and harmful norms, and inspire positive action. Health experts and UNICEF staff answer questions, while the presence of community leaders adds legitimacy to the events and helps sustain impact.

• **Public service announcements:** Radio and TV PSAs in Hausa and other local languages challenge key barriers, inspire positive action, and help underscore the learnings and impact of *Madubi* and community recordings.

• **Media capacity building:** Training staff from Nigerian radio and TV stations helps build their skills to produce high quality local language programming about polio vaccination, routine immunisation, and child health. Multi-layered training is tailored to suit the needs of particular stations and individuals, and includes co-production of radio programmes, *Madubi Live Community Outreach* events and PSAs, attachments with the *Madubi* writing team, and other hands-on technical, thematic and editorial trainings. Capacity building also includes work with UNICEF’s Journalists Against Polio network in the North East.

So far, under the MERCI Project, BBC Media Action has delivered:

• 144 episodes of the *Madubi* radio drama produced and broadcast on 44 stations
• *Madubi Live* events in 26 communities
• 19 radio PSAs broadcast on 76 stations
• 5 TV PSAs broadcast on 100 stations
• 180+ radio PSAs produced by partner stations
• 29 existing local radio health programmes improved, and 2 new local programmes created
• 127 local media professionals from 18 stations trained
• Over $800,000 worth of free airtime for broadcast of *Madubi* and PSAs
Results

Quantitative and qualitative assessments have been used across the lifetime of the project to understand its reach and impact on audiences. Research has helped project activities adapt over time, as well as ensure that media content and trainings reflect the different and changing contexts and day-to-day lives and challenges of audiences across Northern Nigeria.

Results show that the project is reaching a high proportion of the target population with trusted content that has improved audiences’ knowledge, countered misinformation, addressed barriers to behavioural change, encouraged communal discussion of polio vaccination and routine immunisation, fostered positive attitudes towards immunisations and vaccinators, and increased audiences’ willingness to vaccinate their children.

Reach

• In 6 focal states in North West Nigeria, 57% of caregivers who listened to radio (some of whom also watched TV) at least once a week and were aged 15 years old and above with a child under 5 years had heard or seen a BBC Media Action MERCI project output.

• And of the same sample, Madubi was listened to by 17% of caregivers in the 6 focal states.

• Just 3 months after Madubi began airing in North East Nigeria, a UNICEF U-Report poll showed 10% listenership among those responding to the polls. Listenership is expected to grow over time.
Trust

- *Madubi* is highly trusted, in part because the sounds and characters are familiar to audiences, but also because the information tallies with other trusted sources.

- *Madubi* differs from other sources by presenting information in a creative way that helps listeners make a more profound connection with the risks of polio.

- Community leaders say that while previous efforts to promote polio vaccination were rejected because people were simply told what to do, they had far greater success with the participatory *Madubi Live* events. The inclusion of religious leaders alongside experts and actors meant audiences trusted what they heard.

Knowledge and misconceptions

- Audiences were more likely than non-audiences to understand how polio is transmitted, the risks of polio, and its impact on lives.

- Audiences say that *Madubi* helped them be confident in rejecting false narratives about the polio vaccine – in particular the narrative that it is a means to control the population of Muslims in the north.

- Audiences had better knowledge of vaccine intervals and the national immunisation schedule compared to non-audiences.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Ibid. Logistic regression show listeners were twice as likely and people who saw TV PSAs 1.5 times as likely compared to non-listeners to know about the national schedule.
Barriers to change

- The fortunes of the fictional, but familiar, households and characters on Madubi are powerful cognitive tools for behaviour change.
- There are occasions where Madubi is being used as a tool to negotiate the uptake of healthier behaviours in relationships – specifically, to convince sceptical partners (both male and female), older relatives, and neighbours of the benefits of immunisation.
- There is also some evidence that Madubi listeners have shifted where the responsibilities lie in their households, with some men taking a greater role in children’s immunisation, specifically stepping in to look after the immunisation cards.
- Others say that after listening they feel a greater obligation to talk to their neighbours who do not listen to the programme and do not immunise their children.

Increased communal discussion

- Audiences were more likely than non-audiences to discuss plans for polio immunisation at home.
- Audiences were significantly more likely to talk about polio with people inside and outside of their household\(^5\), even while discussion of polio reduced overall between mid-2015 and late 2016. This suggests that Madubi and PSAs prolong engagement and help ensure that polio continues to feel salient over time.
- Madubi Live Community Outreach events were unusual in bringing both men and women together. The events were seen as prestigious and a source of great pride which brought the community together.

\(^5\) 62% of caregivers reported discussing plans for immunisation at baseline (2014), compared to 40% at endline (2016), BBC Media Action surveys. Audience to non-audience comparison at endline using logistic regression (controls included for education, state, income, gender, age and ethnicity) show that discussion and planning is higher amongst people who watch and listen. Madubi listeners are 1.4 times as likely to discuss plans compared to non-listeners. Radio spot listeners are 1.9 times as likely, TV spot viewers 1.6 times as likely. See BBC Media Action, MERCI Phase 1 & 2 endline report (January 2017).
Positive attitudes

- Audiences were more receptive to vaccinator visits compared to non-audiences. They were more likely to let them enter their houses, ask questions of vaccinators, and encourage neighbours to vaccinate their children.

- Research has shown a large increase in respondents who feel that responsibility for ensuring children are vaccinated against polio resides with the family, compared to the community or government.

- There is also evidence that Madubi is helping to generate more support for immunisation generally and is normalising care seeking in hospitals in Northern Nigeria.

Increased willingness to vaccinate

- A higher proportion of audiences than non-audiences intend to let vaccinators give their under-5 children polio drops every time they are offered.

- Leaders say that Madubi Live Community Outreach events have led to far greater uptake in their communities. Indeed, in two of the Madubi Live areas, health officials attribute universal uptake in the period after the event to the transformative power of Madubi Live.

- Madubi Live participants report that during the events community leaders made pledges to increase their advocacy of polio immunisation in Friday prayers and through house to house visits with reluctant families, while others pledged to improve their family healthcare.

- There appears to be some changes to social norms in communities that took part in Madubi Live events, with accepting polio vaccination and full childhood immunisation now being seen as normal whilst refusers of vaccination are starting to be seen as less acceptable.

“It is really enlightening especially the aspect of polio because my husband doesn’t like the polio (vaccination), but since I made him start listening to the program, he now allows the children to receive the immunisation.”

Mother, Jintilo, Borno

6 Ibid. Logistic regression show listeners are twice as likely as non-listeners to say that they had taken action as a result of vaccinator visits; audiences of the TV PSAs are 1.3 times as likely to have taken action.
Going forward

The MERCI Project has achieved great success and results so far. Its trusted media outputs addressing polio, routine immunisation and wider child health issues have helped increase knowledge, counter misconceptions, shift norms and overcome barriers to change, foster family and community discussion, improve attitudes towards immunisation and vaccinators, and engender a greater willingness to vaccinate children in Northern Nigeria.

But the job is not done. Building on and sustaining this positive change is essential to ensure long-term continuation of social norms and behaviours that protect Nigerian children against childhood illnesses, including polio, through vaccination.

As Nigeria enters the ‘polio endgame’ phase, the percentage of children receiving the full immunisation schedule at health clinics must increase greatly from present levels – and be sustained – in order to fully eliminate polio from the country.

The MERCI Project has a key role to play in helping take on this new challenge. By adapting already popular outputs like Madubi and creating new media content tailored to meet changing objectives, the UNICEF-funded MERCI Project will continue to help reduce the number of deaths and disabilities among children under 5 caused by vaccine-preventable diseases.