



Stories of Change

Our Immunization Initiatives



Polio Immunization Projects

Amref health Africa has been implementing Polio Eradication project since 2013. The project named 'Strengthening Capacity of Community and Partners on Polio Eradication Initiatives and Community Base Surveillance', has been implemented in three phases.

The project contributes towards the national polio eradication effort on outbreak preparedness and response through multi-sectoral approach and community engagement in the border, pastoralist & hard-to-reach woredas and bring sustainable change towards achieving the global health security agenda.

CORE Group Partners Project (CGPP) is responsible for capacity building, community mobilization, facilitating transportation of vaccines and vaccinators, maintaining refrigerators, and monitoring and supervising the routine activities, performance and the polio campaigns.





Training Volunteers to Ease the Workload of Health Extension Workers

Atalelech Negash is a Health Extension Worker (HEW) who lives in Mirsha Bitu Gelega kebele in Hammer district. She is one of the HEWs who received training on community engagement and surveillance provided by Amref Health Africa (Amref) Polio Project. She tells us the tremendous value Amref has added through training of volunteers and provision of resources and tools to support her engage and support her community. Atalelech's community historically had a low rate of vaccine acceptance and were unwilling to travel to the health facility to be treated for any illness.

Through HEW such as Atalelech and volunteers, Amref's Polio Project started collecting data on members who have been vaccinated and those who refused or discontinued vaccination. Trained volunteers began traveling to the community, meeting with those who live in distant areas two to three times a month and providing health and other related services. At times when Atalelech and her colleagues are busy in the health center, the volunteers will take the questionnaires/referral slip they received from Amref during the trainings, collect information and bring them back to the HEWs. This has helped reach more community members and improved the vaccine acceptance rate significantly.





Atalelech says, "Amref has greatly eased our workload. We did not have a service supported by assessment and data. But now, Amref has trained volunteers and they are doing survey work for us, and with their recommendation, we have been able to reach those who are sick and have not received vaccination, and it has helped us a lot. Therefore, such technical assistance by Amref Polio Project has really helped us improve our reach, and we wish that the support and supervision continue."





Community Interventions to Improve Facility Births and Immunization Follow-ups

Yero Nara, 45, from Bena Tsema district, South Omo, is a trained traditional birth assistant. She works as a volunteer helping connect pregnant women to health facilities to reduce the rate of risk associated with home deliveries. Having enrolled in a community-based surveillance training for volunteers, she goes door-to-door to educate pregnant women about available health services to improve the continuum of care. She mobilizes her community and organizes health education sessions supported by Amref's Polio Eradication Project.

Yero is happy to help fellow women in her community. She recalls when women would run into the woods to avoid learning about vaccinations, pregnancy checks, and treatment adherence. Some would drop out of treatment or regular vaccination programs. It was difficult for her to see women in her community and newborns suffer from avoidable complications. Yero and other volunteers work together with the community, integrating reproductive health and hygiene training. Now, the benefits of pregnancy follow-up, assisted delivery and infant vaccinations are fully accepted.



Yero speaks of the results of such initiatives: "We expect our kebele rise to a role model position. There are measurable, meaningful changes, many of them. Not long ago, no woman considered visiting a maternity clinic for either pre or post pregnancy checks or delivery unless she reaches a critical situation endangering her life or immunization. It's only life-threatening complications that develop close to delivery, that force them to seek support. Today, they go seeking it and regularly. They don't even wait for the ambulance to arrive. They do it without being reminded. We're watching our effort bearing fruit. I thank all for enabling us to realize such wonderful changes. Amref's capacity building programs have proven truly helpful."

Towards Eradicating Polio through Multi-Sectoral and Participatory Approach



Biruk Ahmed, Head of South Ari Woreda Health Office, always watches the community-centered polio eradication efforts in South Ari, a pastoralist area in South Ari. He believes Amref Health Africa's and other partners' support over the past years and now accelerated the progress towards achieving polio eradication in several districts and kebeles in South Ari.

"Amref is always at the forefront in our polio vaccination campaigns, awareness raising initiatives and frontline health workers and community volunteers' capacity building efforts. We had gaps in terms of reaching our people who live in remote areas. We had shortage of vaccines and our surveillance capacity and response was weak and slow. With the support of Amref and other partners we have now managed to successfully deliver outreach services in these places, and increase vaccine uptake. I am a witness, this greatly helps us reduce the incidence of polio in our areas. We can see now healthy children," Biruk said.



Previous efforts to reach those communities living in remote parts of the district and provide immunization services have been hindered by lack of logistical and technical support. Trained health workers and community volunteers have not been widely deployed to deliver the services to communities most in need.

“We closely work with Amref’s Polio eradication project to ensure better immunization and health service delivery for our community. Through a multi-sectoral and participatory approach, we bring together our health workers, community volunteers and partners’ experts for technical backup, and mobilize our communities towards the national polio eradication effort on outbreak preparedness and response,”





Trained Community Mobilizers are at the Frontline in the Fight against Polio

In places where people are disenfranchised from the basic health services due to difficult geographic location and poor infrastructure, community volunteers lead the way and play essential roles in polio eradication efforts.

Ayike Beshi is a 52-year old community mobilizer in Olka Kibo kebele of Bena Tsemay woreda. Trained by Amref Health Africa, his job is to support health workers by mobilizing communities in his Kebele and beyond to bring children to health facilities and polio immunization outreach sites. He spots parents who have children and encourages them to bring their children the services.

As a very important part of his work, he always accompanies and supports health workers as they patrol village-to-village, door-to-door. He is also engaged in creating awareness and breaks misconceptions about vaccination. This requires a lot of time and energy and a set of skills.

Ayike lends his eyes and ears to track down mothers and children who are kept at home without getting health services, including vaccination.

"I will not sit back. I rather tirelessly work almost around the clock and try all my best to keep children in my community polio-free and grow healthy," Ayike said. The warm welcome and support he receives from his community keep Ayike moving and working hard day and night. He believes due to his and fellow trained community workers' engagement, health workers commitment to delivering the services, community's attitude towards seeking healthcare has started to change. "Previously, many, in Bena Tsemay and other districts, heavily relied on traditional way of treating illnesses, and seldom visited health facilities unless they fall sick seriously. Now we can see positive changes happening. Community members are now visiting health facilities for health care services, particularly for vaccinations. Their knowledge about the importance of vaccine as a means of disease prevention has enhanced."

Ayike's participation in various trainings and health education materials he received has greatly enhanced his awareness of the kinds of diseases that affected his communities and preventions methods. This has been instrumental in educating the community, particularly in areas with high illiteracy rates. Pictorials materials have particularly proven helpful in conveying health information effectively and efficiently. They have facilitated accessible and rapid learning, leading to increased understanding and prompting the community to ask for further guidance.

Ayike's dedication, supported by training and educational materials, has made a significant impact on creating health-seeking communities and improved vaccine uptake across Bena Tsemay District.



