



FAST AND FAIR SUPPORT TO COVID-19 VACCINE DELIVERY IN BURUNDI



Figure 1: Shield with instruments to prevent and fight against Covid-19

I. General Introduction

As response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CARE International in Burundi has implemented a COVID-19 humanitarian intervention (funded by CARE USA/ECSA's flexible funds) that ended in June 2021. CARE Burundi focused its risk communication and community engagement intervention on the negative economic impacts of the pandemic on women's workload and health. CARE Burundi has experimented with SMS awareness and community and youth-focused hackathons (idea challenges/solutions) as empowering



and dignified mobilizations approaches, unlike traditional outreach activities (widely known as "sensitization", a rather tiring and degrading concept).

In addition to this humanitarian intervention, Fast & Fair for Covid-19 vaccine Delivery in Burundi is another intervention that CARE International in Burundi implemented with funding from CARE USA. This intervention came to contribute to a deep engagement with communities to provide reliable and accurate information, facilitate dialogue to understand perceptions, disseminate vaccine opportunities available across the country and build partnerships with community influential people including youth and community health workers. This Fast and Fair Support to COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery in Burundi intervention was implemented over a period from December 1, 2021 to November 30, 2022 and focused on four (04) communes among those targeted by the current project (Youth Solutions- Sexual Reproductive Health / TUBAKARORERO). These are concretely the communes Gihanga of Bubanza Province, Kabezi of Bujumbura Province, Giheta and Itaba of Gitega Province.

The project targeted pre-identified influential people at the community level for the dissemination of specific knowledge, the benefits of prevention, side effects and vaccination opportunities. A total of 200 resource persons (including adults and youth) have received regular messages related to prevention, the practice of barrier measures and COVID-19 vaccination opportunities and were encouraged to provide their views through the digital SMS platform.

In addition, CARE supported community dialogues, interest, action and knowledge generation. Using the local production of 4 mini videos in four communal youth centers, the focus was on combating disinformation, highlighting best practices in prevention efforts and supporting the most at-risk community members.

Finally, CARE supported four (04) joint youth and community health workers initiatives related to surveillance (active search for suspect cases and probable cases for appropriate follow-up). Emphasis was placed on highly mobile young adults (moving regularly between rural areas and cities). This group represents both an opportunity and a risk in terms of preventing and spreading COVID-19. As a result, support has been provided to joint ventures that provide visibility to those who wish to be vaccinated or who have already been vaccinated.



I. Current context in Burundi

Despite the increase in cases, the population stopped observing barrier measures which is a high risk of contamination in the beginning of the year when the Government lifted the measure of screening passengers entering the ports of entry (airport, lake and land). According to a status report on the response to Covid-19 written and published on January 14, 2023, Burundi has 506 active cases of Covid-19 with a total of 93 cases of Covid-19 detected out of 1,229 screening tests carried out in the week of the lifting of this measure; a positivity rate of 7.6% (above the control threshold of 5%). This shows that the disease is still within our walls. This high positivity rate reflects the active circulation of the coronavirus in the Burundian population in the current context of total relaxation of compliance with barrier measures. It should be noted that for 2027304 tests conducted, 52429 cases were confirmed positive with 51908 cases cured and 15 deaths. As for vaccination, the national total is 31292 people who received at least one dose; of whom 30699 were fully vaccinated, representing 0.24% of the general population. These vaccinations are carried out in 6 sites that have been opened since October 18, 2022: 4 in Bujumbura Mairie, 1 site in Gitega and 1 site in Ngozi.

Although the Ministry of Public Health is coordinating the national COVID-19 prevention and response plan with support from the international community, including WHO, the national economy is in dire straits (soaring inflation, accelerated depreciation of the national currency, widespread rise of market prices, low foreign exchange reserves) and the government's public health services and capacities are being tested almost exclusively in the UN-sponsored system, which has made it possible to vaccinate UN and NGO staff (and some of their dependents). There is a strong need to support the Department in its efforts to combat Covid-19 by educating communities on disease prevention measures including the availability of vaccines at the national level.

II. Key Project Interventions

The key interventions of this project revolve around the following three points:

1. Targeting pre-identified influential people at the community level to disseminate specific knowledge about the benefits of prevention, health consequences of the disease, and vaccination opportunities. A total of 223 contacts (including adults and youth) have received regular messages related to prevention, barrier practices and COVID-19 vaccination opportunities, and were encouraged to provide their views through the digital SMS platform.



2. Support for community dialogues, interest, action and knowledge generation. Using the local production of 4 mini videos in four communal youth centers, the focus was on combating disinformation, highlighting best practices in prevention efforts and supporting the most at-risk community members.
3. Finally, the creation of four (04) initiatives by youth and community health workers related to surveillance (active search for suspect cases and probable cases for appropriate follow-up). Special emphasis has been placed on highly mobile young adults (moving regularly between rural areas and cities) although this group represents both an opportunity and a risk in terms of prevention and spread of COVID-19. The two groups of people have jointly undertaken a visibility to people wanting to get vaccinated.

IV. Achievement against indicators

1. In relation with the number of community engagement dialogues and events held: 16 engagement sessions/outreach of influential people in the community, Youth and Community Health Workers were conducted by CARE in collaboration with the District Medical Officers of the 4 Districts to engage them deeply in providing safe and accurate information:
 - 4 of these sessions were facilitated by the medical officers of the health districts and the municipal administration and there were in the end of the competition contests to assess knowledge about Covid-19 and the methods of its prevention including vaccination possibilities. Prizes, in the form of a COVID-19 Hygiene Kit, were awarded to the winners as a motivation.
 - 4 exchanges were about initiatives to inform the population at risk about the possibilities of catching the disease or contaminating others.
 - Finally, 4 sessions were held to present the initiatives in the form of competitions. These included videos, interactive theatres, artistic drawings, art objects, songs and poems.

Among COVID-19 prevention awareness initiatives, those that have had more points are:

Ranking by commune and initiative		
Commune	Initiative	score
ITABA	Song and Video	81,33%
KABEZI	Art object	85,33%



GIHETA	Slam/poem	83,33%
GIHANGA	sketch	85,33%

2. 4 awareness sessions on countering disinformation and highlighting best practices in COVID-19 prevention and control efforts were conducted in the 4 communes. 3824 youth and 709 adults participated.
3. In collaboration with the administration, religious leaders, youth focal points and community health workers held: 30 awareness sessions on the disease, its prevention and the existence of the vaccine were conducted by participants (community health workers and youth focal points and photographers) in the community with 6081 participants represented by 5134 youth and 947 adults. Of these 30 sensitization sessions carried out, 7 took place in Giheta with 1551 young and 163 adults, 11 in Itaba with 3105 young and 551 adults, 7 in Kabezi with 171 youth and 105 adults and 5 in Gihanga with 307 youth and 128 adults.
4. Relative to the number of local contacts on the SMS platform actively sharing accurate vaccine information:
 - 223 influential people composed of 12 young focal points, 12 photographers and 188 community health workers, 3 staffs, 4 communal administrators, 4 chief doctors of the health districts in whose area are located the 4 communes of Gihanga, Kabezi, Giheta and Itaba have been registered as beneficiaries in the SMS platform to actively transmit information on coronavirus disease, prevention methods and the existence of the vaccine.
 - 1120 SMS were sent and 46 return messages were provided by recipients to clarify issues related to COVID-19.
5. People at risk (highly mobile youth, elderly) with specific knowledge about the disease and vaccination options: 20 young photographers/focal points have been identified as people at-risk as their job requires them to travel regularly and make contact with different people. They were trained about the disease and its prevention as well as about photography, videography and journalistic writing. 12 smartphones were granted to the 4 youth centers to facilitate their collection of photos and videos. These



youth have created their Twitter and Facebook pages to share information and initiatives created on COVID-19 prevention and control.

- 4 initiatives related to the dissemination of specific knowledge and vaccination opportunities were created by youth in collaboration with community health workers and were supported by 4 hair salon kits. These are songs, poems, drawings and art objects.
- 4 mini-videos were produced by the young focal points and photographers: this is a staging performed by community health workers, young focal points and photographers. These videos provide information about COVID-19 prevention and control methods to the most at-risk community members such as youth, the elderly. These videos are the result of the training that these young people had on videography/photography and are taken using the mobile phones that were granted to these young people as part of this project. They are shared among young people through WhatsApp groups.

III. **LESSONS LEARNED**

- The administration and representatives of health services have greatly appreciated this innovative initiative (raising awareness and informing young people and members of the community at the grassroots through sms) which will affect the majority of the population of the target area.
- Young people are true drivers of change induced by their sense of creativity and initiatives: songs, dances, drawings and art objects.
- The learning of videography, photography and journalistic writing has been a catalyst for the exhibition of the talents and passion of young people who have succeeded in producing and availing them at youth centers with the aim of raising awareness among others who visit these places.
- Community dialogues conducted by youth in schools play centers and Community Health Agents carried their voices very far to learn about the existence of COVID-19 vaccination centers.
- Pitches related to COVID-19 initiatives and the availability of vaccination opportunities have increased the self-esteem of young presenters in the public.
- Collaboration between Community Health Agents (CHA), Health Centers (HC), the different religions and the Administration have made community dialogues to be held easily in village meetings and around health training which has prompted the CHA to mobilize people to get tested in large numbers.



- Public awareness of hand hygiene measures has increased.
- The observance of the rules of hygiene in case of cough or sneeze was a habit for the population sensitized with the texts received by telephone.
- This surplus of people to receive text messages is due to the fact that doctors, communal administrators and project staff have asked to be among the recipients of the messages disseminating specific information about COVID-19 for the sake of control.
- The availability of equipment (offered through the Solutions SRH Community project) for the production and projection of videos in youth centers is a lasting asset for the production and projection of videos for COVID-19 awareness campaigns and even on other epidemics that may occur.
- In songs, slams and poems, actors of the project on the field have exhibited their talent in their artistic originality which gives hope that people only need a catalyst to increase their design thoughts in any field.
- Posters of drawings designed in youth centers and hairdressing salons by the young focal points will continue to raise awareness even after the closing of this intervention.

IV. Challenges Encountered

- Lack of government policy to raise awareness for vaccination has disadvantaged mass commitment to vaccination.
- The population has loosened in observing COVID-19 prevention measures which can cause other epidemiological diseases such as cholera.
- Porous borders can encourage importation of COVID-19 cases. We should have strategies to ensure that the barriers are respected.
- Anti-vaccine rumors either using religious beliefs and fear of control by the new world order (microchip) have caused the population to not massively adhere to the vaccine in mass.

IV. Recommendations and Adjustment Strategies

- The use of text messages for the popularization of knowledge towards the population in future initiatives remains a strategy to be promoted especially with regard to mass awareness which requires reaching out to several people in a short time.



- The epidemiological situation requires the intensification of activities to strengthen the prevention of Covid-19 in the community: communication and public awareness for the respect of barrier measures; screening and surveillance.
- Extension of messaging to community health workers of all health formations related to the fight against endemic diseases would help to combat them effectively because these agents are everywhere in the country and have the phones to receive these types of awareness messages.

Conclusion

The activities that have been carried out revolve around the following points: sensitization through competitions, transmission of SMS messages to influential people in the community including community health workers and young people, presentations of interactive theatres used for video production and other supported initiatives for their broad outreach to the community through public exhibitions in strategic settings such as youth centers, markets, community playgrounds, schools and health centers and hair salons.

Continuity of awareness is essential through the dissemination of SMS messages, posters and video projections in public settings, and the publication of videos produced by project participants.



Appendices

1. Some testimonies

MANIRAKIZA Pascasie, a CHA from Gihanga said: “I am very pleased to have been an agent of change for our community, the people for whom I raised awareness about hand washing to prevent COVID-19 contamination have also fought dirty hand diseases like cholera and dysentery.”

Ninziza Jean Claude, a young person from Kabezi, said, “I am very pleased to have raised awareness among the youth who subsequently attended the COVID-19 awareness raising sessions held at the Kabezi Youth Centre and won awards.”



Gloire NINZIZA, a youth from the Giheta Youth Centre, said, “The project enabled me to showcase my talents as an artist in COVID-19 design.”

NIYIBITANGA Christiane, a CHA from Itaba commune, said: I am pleased with the project that took place here and, in addition to giving us training and sensitization in the training room, was added the strategy of transferring messages in our cellular phones, which reminds me to spread the information wherever I am with my cell. Frankly, I appreciated this approach, which does not always require going with the modules to disseminate information.”

2. Some photos



The photos below reflect the atmosphere during awareness raising sessions and competitions by youth and community health workers for the community.





Figure 3: Live performance of a song on the protecting methods against Covid-19 by the youth and health workers of Giheta



Figure 4: Sensitization of the youth during summer camps





Figure 5: Sensitization of the youth and adults about Covid-19 prevention in Kabezi



Figure 6: Awarding of prizes to winners of the competition about the best initiates of sensitization



Figure 7: Pair of baskets with a mask drawing as a sensitization tool.



Figure 8: Presentation of a drawing for the sensitization on Covid-19 in Gihanga



Figure 9: Sensitization about Covid-19 through the projection of a video produced by young photographers.



Figure 10: Community mobilization on the fight against Covid-19 organized by th youth of Itaba.

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