No Settlement Too Far, Going the Distance in Eradicating Polio

The discovery of the wild poliovirus in July 2016 in the State of Borno, after more than two years without reporting a case, shocked the eradication endeavours in Nigeria. Inaccessibility as a result of insecurity caused by Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) poses a great risk and impediment to the global polio eradication efforts.

The biggest challenge faced by the Local Government Area (LGA) teams was reaching missed children in the security challenged areas in Borno, mainly because their locations (geo-coordinates) were unknown. The lack of distinct ward boundaries, further, exacerbated this issue, as LGA teams were unclear on their areas of coverage and responsibility. Additionally, for the farther and hard to reach settlements, it was logistically impossible to maintain vaccine integrity due to unavailability of refrigeration units or ice packs. Mohammed Gambo, the Local Immunization Officer (LIO) in Konduga Local Government Area of Borno State faced these battles regularly as he shouldered the responsibility of planning, implementing and monitoring immunization campaigns across the 11 wards in his LGA.

"Before 2016 we didn't have geo coordinates to identify abandoned or inhabited settlements. We were ignorant of geo-coordinates, boundary adjustments and even the numbers of settlements we have."

- Mohammed Gambo

In 2016, eHealth Africa along with other partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), eHealth Africa (eHA), Solina Health, U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), UNICEF collaborated with the government of Nigeria to launch robust response strategies to expand polio vaccination from accessible areas to inaccessible areas in Borno State. eHA provided advanced GIS technology and an able team of field officers to track reached settlements using mobile devices so as to provide geo-evidence of visits by the vaccination teams. eHA consultants also worked closely with the LGA teams to collect geo-location and ever-changing habitation and security information for settlements to enable efficient planning of campaigns across varying accessibilities.; thus ensuring that any missed settlements are factored into the next campaign.

Gambo and his team are better able to ensure the accountability of vaccination teams, using mobile applications developed and provided by eHA. The applications help them to track vaccination teams, and to locate hard-to-reach settlements leading to a greater immunization coverage in Borno State. In addition, eHA consultants are involved at every stage of the lifecycle of campaigns and provide post-campaign feedback using maps, which allows Gambo to make data-driven and informed decisions about the future interventions.

The positive impact of eHA cannot be overemphasized, formerly when we sent out our teams for vaccination, they didn't cover the expected areas, but with the assistance of eHealth Africa, we are able to monitor their movement through the Vaccinator Tracking System. We are now also able to understand coordinates, and boundary adjustments.

- Mohammed Gambo

Thanks to the work of eHealth Africa and other partners, more hard to reach settlements are being covered. In security challenged environments, 5,598 settlements have been reached since January this year and since March 2017 over 124.417 children vaccinated during the special interventions targeting security-challenged settlements. The meticulous tracking done on settlement visitation done over multiple campaigns has also led to a dramatic rise in the coverage of settlements during the Immunization Plus Days (IPD) campaigns. This proves beyond any doubt, that we are truly going the distance in our work to eradicate Polio in Borno state and Nigeria.

25 LGAs tracked during IPDs

94.4% settlement coverage during IPDs Planned visits in April 2018

72% Percentage of missed settlements during IPDs dropped by 72% since November 2017. n April 2018.

7000+ settlement names collected and updated in the Geodatabase