

STOP 55 TRAINING FOLLOWING AMMAR'S JOURNEY DURING THE SBC WEEK



Ammar Shafiq, participant at the STOP 55 Training, in Kampala, Uganda.

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After being held in Atlanta last year, the [STOP Program](#) was brought back, this time in Kampala, Uganda from 24 April to 12 May 2023. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) partnered with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to train Social and Behavior Change (SBC) specialists who will be placed in UNICEF country offices around the world. The SBC cohort included a total of 14 new specialists with various backgrounds who underwent three weeks of training facilitated by CDC and UNICEF staff from polio SBC and immunization teams.

Focusing on SBC, the third week included topics such as standard operating procedures for outbreaks; routine immunization; situational, audience and behavioral analysis; microplanning; use of data; and misinformation management. The week offered a deep dive into SBC work and its challenges, alternating between inspiring lectures, group exercises and scenario activities to break the ice, keep participants engaged and create team spirit between the future ‘STOPpers’. All participants had the opportunity to discuss topics, learn from each other and gain a better understanding of their role going forward. This includes developing a communication plan to reach more children and improve the impact of SBC strategy on the field.

This article highlights the reflections of Ammar Shafiq, a STOP 55 participant from Pakistan and future STOPper, and sheds light on key learnings from the SBC training and its significance in achieving behaviour change for routine immunization and polio eradication. We followed him on the fourth day of the SBC week.

1. Profile and background

Originally from Pakistan, Ammar Nousheka Shafiq currently works for the government as a community engagement coordinator in Toronto, Canada. Having worked with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) for almost 10 years, his expertise lies in reducing vaccine hesitancy, increasing uptake and generating demand. In his home country, he worked as a communication specialist for the World Health Organization (WHO) before joining the Islamic Advisory Group as a focal person for polio eradication. Later, he became an international polio communication consultant for UNICEF Afghanistan in some of the most remote parts of the country, namely Uruzgan, Helmand and Kandahar. Along with his fellow participants, Shafiq brings valuable insights to the STOP 55 training.

2. Reflections on the SBC week

Ammar recognizes the immense value of the third week of training in equipping participants with essential SBC tools for their future roles as STOPpers. The comprehensive coverage of topics such as situational analysis, crisis communication and routine immunization, among others, through valuable presentations and multiple practical activities provides participants with efficient tools and strategies to implement in their respective districts and countries.



Group discussion with UNICEF's speaker Surangani Abeysekera (SBC Specialist, Immunization Team, NY HQ) during a practical exercise.

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3. Focus on Day Four - Highlights

Given his prior and extensive experience in polio eradication, Ammar found the lectures on strengthening routine immunization and vaccine demand particularly valuable as they enabled him to acquire more skills for his new role as a STOPper.

He also noted the relevance of the session on infodemic management, recognizing its importance in addressing misinformation challenges and the role of social media in driving social change. Additionally, he highlighted the comprehensive nature of the novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) communication session, which emphasized the complexity and relevance of communication involving this prominent vaccine in the field. Finally, Ammar stressed the importance of equipping participants with comprehensive knowledge to effectively respond to associated challenges. The systematic approach presented during the training, from designing and planning to implementing communication and SBC strategies, resonated as a key takeaway. The future STOPper emphasized that this approach, often overlooked by C4D practitioners, would contribute to effective microplanning and implementation of activities.



Ammar and his group working on their final presentation.

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4. How would he describe STOPpers in Pakistan?

Drawing from his experience in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Ammar emphasizes the valuable role of STOPpers in complementing the work of national and provincial teams in this region. STOPpers are welcomed by multiple communities and gain exposure to different cultures. Their presence and engagement help foster acceptance, learning and outreach to challenging regions, thereby contributing to the success of vaccination campaigns. The opportunity for STOPpers to support such campaigns in challenging areas is seen as invaluable.

5. One word or sentence to describe this SBC week?

According to Ammar, “SBC is the core of vaccination; if you want to reach everyone, every child, all the communities.” This underscores the vital role of SBC in creating demand, achieving the ambitious goals of immunization and ultimately ensuring equitable access to vaccination for all communities.

The STOP 55 SBC week training in Kampala provided participants, including Ammar Shafiq, with a comprehensive understanding of SBC strategies for routine immunization and polio eradication. The insights gained and the practical tools studied during the STOP 55 training will empower STOPpers to effectively implement SBC initiatives and strengthen immunization programmes worldwide. By prioritizing SBC as the foundation of vaccination strategies, global health efforts can create sustainable demand and ensure successful immunization outcomes. To conclude, as Surangani Abeysekera said, “We want a world where parents are coming to us for vaccination and not us requesting them to vaccinate.”

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