

# OVERCOMING HESITANCY

## A FAMILY'S JOURNEY WITH ORAL POLIO VACCINATION



In Maun, within the Ngamiland district, a young woman recounts her experience of overcoming vaccine hesitancy during the second phase of the polio vaccination campaign. **Sarah**, a kiosk attendant in Maun and a mother of three young children—two boys aged 6 and 4, and a 3-year-old girl—has always believed in the importance of vaccination. She steadfastly adheres to routine immunizations for her children, as recommended by health professionals, convinced that vaccines save lives.



Sarah stands proudly at her workplace. A beacon of health advocacy in the Ngamiland district, she overcame vaccine hesitancy to protect her children and community against polio. Photo Credits: UNICEF/Botswana/2023

During the initial round of supplementary immunization activities against polio in Botswana, Sarah readily agreed to have her children vaccinated by the door-to-door teams. The decision was made without needing to consult her husband, who works in Kasane, Chobe district, as both parents understand and value the benefits of vaccination. However, after this round, all three children developed fever and vomiting that lasted for 4-5 days, a reaction Sarah had to manage on her own due to her husband's work commitments elsewhere.

The adverse reactions from the first dose led Sarah to resolve against participating in the second phase of the campaign, fearing the vaccine's effects on her children's health. Despite the social mobilization teams' efforts to persuade her, she remained hesitant. The turning point came through the encouragement and support of her husband. Upon learning of her reluctance, he highlighted the crucial choice between temporary discomfort and the risk of permanent disability that could arise from incomplete vaccination. He reasoned:

“The headache will disappear soon, but paralysis, if it occurs, is for life. We must complete the recommended dosage to ensure they are fully protected.”

His perspective and counsel changed Sarah's mind, leading her to consent to the second round of polio vaccinations for her children. This decision underscores the importance of immunization not as a sole responsibility of mothers but as a joint effort involving both parents. Moreover, it highlights the critical role of male involvement and community support in health initiatives. While vaccines may sometimes lead to temporary adverse events following immunization (AEFIs), the overarching benefit of protecting children against diseases significantly outweighs these risks.