

STRENGTHENING DEMAND CREATION THROUGH SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE

UNICEF Zambia Leads a Capacity Strengthening Workshop to Enhance Social Mobilization and Community Engagement for Polio Outbreak Response



ZAMBIA

July 2023, Lusaka District, Zambia – Making the right decision, especially at a crossroads, is daunting. It becomes even more complicated for parents and communities deciding whether to vaccinate their children against polio amid conflicting information and life's priorities. Their decision seals their child's fate. UNICEF recognizes that Social and Behavior Change (SBC), particularly through Human-Centered Design, is central to achieving the behavior change leading to immunization demand – specifically, polio vaccination – and saving the lives of thousands of children in Zambia.



Thérèse Matondo Makaya during a home visit in the Athénée health area of Mbanza-Ngungu. Participants of the Social and Behavior Change Capacity Building Workshop with Winfreda Mulenga, Chief of Health Promotion, Ministry of Health, and Dr. Monjur Hossain, Chief of Health and HIV/AIDS, UNICEF Zambia. Photo Credits: UNICEF/Zambia/2023

To integrate SBC into the Polio Eradication Programme, UNICEF Zambia conducted a three-day SBC Capacity Strengthening Workshop from 8 to 10 May 2023 in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. Facilitated by the SBC leads from the UNICEF Eastern & Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), Zambia Country Office (ZCO), and the Ministry of Health (MOH) Zambia, the workshop was attended by UNICEF national SBC consultants, MOH health promotion officers from all 10 provinces of Zambia, and health promotion experts from MOH headquarters.

The workshop – the culmination of needs assessments, strategic planning, and careful participant selection – had several objectives and expected outcomes. These included orienting participants on the overarching immunization program in Zambia and building the capacity of SBC practitioners in developing and implementing innovative demand creation interventions. The workshop also aimed at developing strategic plans for enhanced uptake of immunization services, sharing best practices on demand generation for the immunization program, and introducing the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation & Abuse (PSEA) and gender mainstreaming initiatives and approaches.

The training, with engaging modules, peer-to-peer exchanges, and group work, enhanced participation, shared challenges, and found solutions. Addressing the workshop participants, the Acting Director of Social Determinants, Environment and Health Promotion, Ministry of Health, Dr. Kalangwa Kalangwa, said, «*This workshop will help strengthen social mobilization and community engagement for polio outbreak response, as well as routine Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) services in the country*». He urged the provincial health promotion officers to cascade the lessons learned to health workers at district and municipal levels in the upcoming months.



To bring everyone to the same level of understanding, the training included a rich mix of structured presentations on topics pertinent to SBC, vaccination, country performance, and statistics. It probed and reviewed the social norms, attitudes, behaviors, and practices surrounding the polio outbreak response. The plenary sessions added vibrancy through field narratives and analysis of current approaches and practices. This identified existing gaps and provided an opportunity for learning and forging possible synergies to spearhead behavior change in communities, using existing capacities across Zambia.

«The timing of the workshop could not have been better, as it presents a valuable opportunity not only to learn new ideas and skills but also to share with each other the good practices and learning», said Dr. Monjur Hossain, Chief of Health and HIV&AIDS, UNICEF Zambia. He then added:

QR The recent intervention around SBC Early Adopters, led by the UNICEF Eastern & Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), was a great step in the right direction. The initiative will serve as a crucial stepping-stone for the institutional capacity building that UNICEF Zambia is initiating together with the Ministry of Health and the University of Zambia.

The training provided an excellent interpersonal platform for SBC teams at national and subnational levels, both from MOH and UNICEF, to share current trends and practices tailored to effectively implement human-centered activities. It offered a good forum for MOH and UNICEF SBC personnel to clearly understand support and engagement in supplementing government efforts in community engagement, leveraging community-based resources and partnerships, and SBC practices.

With this newfound knowledge, it is anticipated that SBC practitioners will empower parents and communities to confidently choose polio vaccination and ensure routine immunization for their children, thereby making informed decisions for their health and wellbeing.

Story by Mwembe Stephen Sichone, SBC Officer, UNICEF Zambia