

## NEWSNOTE

### Journalists Initiative on Immunization against Polio in Nigeria

**KANO (Nigeria), 18 July 2012** - Mohammad Abdu Zango is the Chairman of the Journalists Initiative on Immunization against Polio – also known as JAP - in Kano State, Northern Nigeria. During the sub-national polio immunization campaign in July, he travelled from one local government to another reporting on the campaign's progress.

“Journalists play a key role in mobilizing communities towards getting their children immunized against polio. Prior to the campaign, we had been producing and airing radio drama plays on a regular basis. Moreover, our colleagues in the network ensured that media airtime was always available on radio and television stations before, during and after the campaign. Partner stakeholders have also helped us in the development of the key messages we are delivering and disseminating,” Zango said.

It is interesting to note that in Nigeria, the mass media is playing a major role in creating and raising awareness about polio issues, educating the populace on the importance of polio vaccination as well as mobilizing communities to support current polio eradication efforts. Latest UNICEF social data analysis reveals that about 38 percent of caregivers were informed about the polio campaign via radio in Kano State.

According to Zango, “Radio is one of the most popular media in Nigeria, given its widespread coverage all over the country. In fact, radio remains the ideal medium for communicating with low-literacy communities such as those in Northern Nigeria where the average woman of child-bearing age has had less than four years of formal education.”

The journalists' network boasts of about 22 journalists and producers in Kano State. As part of its advocacy programme, the network plans to travel from local government to local government within the year, with the goal of making each local government chairman personally accountable for the polio situation in his area. “We shall ask each of them to make a public commitment via the mass media and thereafter challenge all of them to respect that commitment,” he said.

The mass media continues to play an important role in the polio eradication programme's communication strategy in Nigeria. Besides informing the public about polio in general, the media can also keep the public updated about on-going and up-coming immunization campaigns.

The Journalists' Initiative on Immunization against Polio is a Nigerian non-profit, non-governmental organization which uses advocacy, mass media and interpersonal communication to empower people to adopt healthy lifestyles and behavioural patterns. Its network spans the high-risk Northern Nigerian states of Kebbi, Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Bauchi, Kano, Jigawa, Niger, Gombe and the Federal Capital Territory. Its members are local journalists and they are dedicated to promoting polio immunization programmes as well as increased routine immunization services in Nigeria.

Nigeria had witnessed a 95% decline in the number of polio cases in 2010 and was so close to the finishing line with regard to polio eradication. However, as at July 10, 2012, Nigeria has now recorded 49 new cases of wild polio virus in 10 states compared to 25 cases during the same period in 2011.

In a statement signed by JAP National Team Leader, Kunle Sani, “JAP urges government, development partners and other stakeholders including journalists to take necessary steps to ensure that the December

2012 target of stopping transmission of the wild polio virus in Nigeria remains realistic. If we fail to eradicate this disease soon, the country may find it difficult to concentrate on other equally debilitating diseases affecting our children and women.”

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