

CGPP ARTICLE

"Training of Community Volunteers, Health Workers, Traditional Practitioners and Church Pastors on Community-Based Surveillance of Poliomyelitis and Other Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in the Uvira and Nundu Health Zones, South Kivu, DRC"

Uvira, DRC - August 2024

As part of strengthening the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and combating other vaccine-preventable diseases, the CGPP in DRC with the support of USAID, was organized training for community volunteers, health workers, traditional healers and church pastors in the Uvira and Nundu health zones, located in the province of South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The community volunteers (CVs), essential actors of community engagement, have been selected by the communities themselves in each village and/or quarter. The selection was made in the presence of the political and administrative authorities and local community leaders, according to a set of well-defined criteria. This selection process was inclusive, considering the gender and disability aspect, to ensure that every person who met the criteria and was accepted by the community could participate.



Selection of community volunteers in the Kasenga CEPAC health area by the community under the leadership of the local chief, in the Uvira health zone



In front of the community, the Nurer Supervisor of EPI presents the criteria for the selection of community volunteers and supervisors in the Lusenda Health Area, Nundu Health Zone

This training marked a crucial milestone for the CGPP project, building the capacity of 123 CVs, 25 supervisors, 12 church pastors, and 11 traditional healers in Uvira Health Zone, as well as 113 CVs, 26 supervisors, 12 church pastors, and 11 traditional healers in Nundu Health Zone. The trainings aimed to equip these key actors with the skills needed to effectively conduct community-based surveillance of polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Capacity Building for Community Volunteers

CVs, church pastors and traditional healers, who are key actors in their communities in social mobilization, have been trained on several aspects, including:

- Communication techniques for social behavior change
- Case definition of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP)
- Community engagement and advocacy
- Community-based surveillance of AFP and other vaccine-preventable diseases

In-Depth Training of Supervisors and Care Providers

Supervisors and health workers received extensive training covering the following additional technical aspects:

- Organization of Supplementary Immunization Activities (SIAs)
- Cold Chain Equipment Management
- Supervision and monitoring of vaccination campaigns

"This training has not only equipped us, but it has also strengthened our commitment to work together to eradicate polio in our communities," said Ms. **NZIRITA Faida**, a head nurse and supervisor at the Kalundu CEPAC Health Area, trained in Uvira.



The Head Doctor of the Uvira EPI office strengthens the capacities of health workers on the organization of SIAs and the response to polio in the Nundu health zone



The SBCC coordinator is training community volunteers on communication techniques for social behavior change in Uvira Health Zone

Commitment of Church Pastors and Traditional Practitioners

Recognizing the crucial role of church pastors and traditional healers in their communities, the training also included these influential figures. In each health zone, 12 church pastors and 11 traditional healers have been trained to become allies in community-based polio surveillance. These actors often receive patients first, including potential cases of AFP. Their training therefore aimed to:

- Collaborate effectively with CVs and health workers
- Ensure AFP case finding and reporting

"In our culture, a lot of people come to us first when they get sick. With this training, I learned how to identify the symptoms of diseases like polio. This is a big change for us traditional healers as we can now play a crucial role in the early detection and reporting of AFP cases. I encourage my colleagues to embrace this new role for the good of our community," declared Mr. **HULA SELEMANI**, a traditional healer from the Kalundu health area, in the Uvira Health Zone.



Mr. Selemani, a traditional healer by profession, motivates other traditional healers to report polio cases even if it is a loss of income for them.



Pastor Malisawa participates in a simulation during the community-based surveillance training in Nundu Health Zone.

Pastor **MMUNGA MALISAWA** of the l'AMBA Health Area, for his part, said the following: "As a pastor, I have always listened to the spiritual needs of my community. This training opened my eyes to another essential aspect of my role: public health. Now, I am not only a spiritual guide, but also a key player in the fight against polio. Thanks to this training, I am better equipped to detect and report AFP cases, and to encourage my community to get vaccinated. I am convinced that this strengthened collaboration between churches and health structures will contribute to eradicating this disease in our region."

Community Volunteers and Supervisor Equipment

As a result of the training, CVs and their supervisors were equipped with visibility materials which will help them in their field tasks. This equipment includes vests, hats, plastic boots, t-shirts, polo shirts and badges with clear messages to engage the community in collective action that calls for polio eradication, identifying them as actors in community-based surveillance and community engagement. This visibility equipment will not only allow them to be easily recognized during their field visits to search for cases of AFP and other diseases, but also to be identified and respected during house-to-house visits. This increased visibility aims to strengthen their legitimacy and authority in the communities they serve.

Mr. Patrick JEAN AUMBA, a community volunteer from the Mboko Health Area, said: "I am honored to have been chosen by my community for this role. The training we received not only gave us technical skills, but it also made us aware of the importance of our mission. As a community relay, I now feel better prepared to carry out active case finding and raise awareness among families about the importance of vaccination. This visibility that we received after the training will help us to be recognized and respected in our neighborhoods during our interventions."



Dr. Panzu, Head Doctor of the Uvira Health Zone proceeds by officially handing over the visibility to the community volunteers and supervisors while encouraging them to carry out their task well.



Two volunteers from the Lusenda Health Area are ecstatic with joy when they receive their visibility that will allow them to carry out surveillance in the community

A Solidarity Pledge for Polio Eradication

The training is part of a broader strategy to strengthen local capacity to combat polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases as well as zoonotic diseases in Uvira and Nundu health zones. By empowering these actors at different levels of the community, this training has laid the foundation for more rigorous surveillance and rapid response to AFP cases, which is critical to achieving the goal of polio eradication in the DRC.

These concerted efforts and the commitment of community volunteers, health workers, traditional healers and church pastors represent a ray of hope in the fight against polio in the DRC, bringing the Uvira and Nundu health zones closer to the effective eradication of polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases as well as zoonotic diseases.

Written by:
JEAN-PIE MUKAMA KING
SBCB Coordinator of the CGPP DRC

For more information, please contact:
jeanpie.mukama@thecgpp.org
+243971722055