

UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Region

SBC Works!

Partnership with the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) to endorse COVID-19 vaccination and bridge the COVID-19 vaccination gap



About SBC Works

SBC Works! shares success stories in Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) from Eastern and Southern Africa. SBC uses research and consultation to promote human rights, mobilize leadership, influence attitudes and social norms, and transform behaviours for the well-being of communities. In UNICEF, SBC is guided by the [Behavioural Drivers Model](#) (BDM)¹ and the [Journey to Health and Immunization](#)², which help diagnose and analyse what drives behaviour, design effective interventions targeting those drivers, and measure the achievements of such interventions in the field.

The issue

Since March 2021, UNICEF has transported millions of COVID-19 vaccines into Kenya and supported the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure these vaccines are available and freely accessible to the eligible population. Despite the availability of vaccines, the MoH has continued to record low uptake of COVID-19 vaccination. A Johns Hopkins COVID-19 Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice (KAP) study carried out in September 2021 revealed that the misconception and misinformation on COVID-19 as well as the inconvenience of COVID-19 vaccination service were the critical barriers to the scale-up of COVID-19 vaccine uptake. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that everyone gets the right information through trusted sources and to bring COVID-19 vaccines to people with convenient service.



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98% of Kenyans adhere to one faith or another and religious leaders greatly shape the knowledge, attitudes and practices of their congregations as well as social values based on faith teachings. In this regard, UNICEF Kenya partnered with the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), a coalition of all major faith communities in Kenya that mobilizes their joint efforts to address shared concerns through inter-faith dialogues and collaboration. UNICEF Kenya launched a vaccination drive in partnership with the IRCK and MoH to mobilize religious leaders for COVID-19 vaccination uptake in places of worship in December 2021. As a follow-up, a social mobilization campaign was then launched in July 2022 to further influence behaviour change among congregants and the community to scale up vaccine uptake.



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1 [The Behavioural Drivers Model: A Conceptual Framework for Social and Behaviour Change Programming](#)
2 [Journey to Health and Immunization](#)

SBC Actions



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IRCK has its structures spread across all 47 counties with local Inter-Faith networks, Women of Faith networks and Inter-Faith Youth networks. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, IRCK has been active in the national response to the pandemic through religious endorsement and community social mobilization. In partnership with UNICEF and the MoH, IRCK signed a commitment to have places of worship used as vaccination centres to bridge the COVID-19 vaccination gap in Kenya. UNICEF and IRCK facilitated religious endorsement of vaccination by Christian, Muslim and Hindu theologians and organized a national advocacy event on 8 December 2021 in which MoH and top religious leaders called on everyone to get vaccinated and asked religious leaders to offer their places of worship as vaccination centres to provide convenient vaccination services for people.

Following this advocacy event, IRCK started the vaccination process in the places of worship across 30 counties in Kenya. Under the guidance of UNICEF and IRCK, religious leaders used places of worship such as churches, mosques and temples, on the one hand as vaccination centres so that congregations could get vaccinated immediately after listening to a sermon on the subject; on the other hand, as spaces to create awareness and convey accurate information on COVID-19 vaccines. To address fears and misinformation hindering vaccine uptake, trusted community and religious leaders worked as good role models by taking the vaccine themselves and providing truthful information to people.

To scale up the COVID-19 vaccination efforts, UNICEF with the support of IRCK and in collaboration with MoH, launched a social mobilization campaign for COVID-19 vaccination uptake in places of worship in 24 least-performing counties from July to August 2022. To support trust-building campaigns, IRCK not only printed and distributed 1,200 copies of theologically informed booklets debunking myths and misconceptions about COVID-19 vaccines, but also identified faith leaders to participate in radio talk shows on national and 14 local radio stations (Citizen radio, Chamgei FM, Kass FM, Busia FM, Wimwaro FM, Athiani FM, Musyi FM, Alpha Radio, Egesa FM, Inooro FM, Kameme FM, Serian FM, Namlolwe FM, Ajok FM) so that faith leaders could interact with the audience delivering key messages. Further to this, IRCK leveraged social media platforms to advocate and promote COVID-19 vaccination across the country.

Regular review meetings were held among key stakeholders, including UNICEF, IRCK, Religious Leaders, MoH, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-based Organizations, to follow up on the status of COVID-19 vaccination in the country and make evidence-based planning to address COVID-19 misconceptions and barriers in vaccination services. This collaboration ensured smooth vaccination drives by religious leaders and healthcare workers in the 24 target counties.

Results

Approximately 1,000 Religious leaders from across the target counties were involved in the review meetings and social mobilization calling congregants and the community at large to take up the COVID-19 jab. Collaborations with MoH, the faith communities and like-minded partners in the target counties were strengthened with the different partners working together to scale the COVID-19 vaccination efforts. The Inter-Faith Councils (IFCs) across the 24 counties further generated work plans on how to cascade the vaccination campaign efforts in their counties.

The involvement of religious leaders in the vaccination process has led to an increase in the COVID-19 vaccination rate. After launching the vaccination drive in the places of worship on 8 December 2021 across 30 counties, over 600 places of worship were identified by religious leaders to be used as vaccination centres. Religious leaders at the grassroots level directly mobilized their congregational members, with approximately 2,510,412 persons receiving the COVID-19 jab between December 2021 and March 2022. During the follow-up campaign between 25 July and 17 August 2022, 295,843 people were vaccinated through the efforts of religious leaders across various counties. By the end of December 2022, a total of 4,044,845 congregation members were vaccinated against COVID-19 via IRCK in the places of worship. According to MoH, 15,116,002 people have been fully or partially vaccinated in Kenya, of which 27% were vaccinated at places of worship.

Lessons & way forward

- Religious leaders are instrumental in supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and prevention drives. Leveraging trusted religious leaders to provide accurate information to people and advocate for vaccination is effective for improving uptake.



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UNICEF and IRCK will continue the collaboration and support of the religious leaders and MoH in calling for congregants and the community to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

- Myths and misconceptions still abound among some populations on COVID-19 vaccines. To overcome this, religious leaders are armed with COVID-19 booklets to debunk such misinformation and flyers are distributed among the communities. UNICEF and IRCK will continue to mobilize religious leaders to keep communities informed in the places of worship and to spread accurate COVID-19 messages through different platforms. The monitoring of the effectiveness of the distributed IEC materials is to be conducted in the subsequent quarters.
- Setting up mobile vaccination sites in places of worship provides convenient vaccination services to people and contributes to higher COVID-19 vaccine uptake. After vaccinating people who were willing to come to health facilities, it has become necessary to bring vaccines closer to communities and persuade people to get vaccinated.
- With IRCK's nationwide religious volunteer networks including the Local Inter-Faith Networks, Women of Faith Networks and Inter-Faith Youth networks, the campaign can work towards a target of vaccinating the entire adult population of Kenya, with a focus on hard-to-reach populations and high-risk populations.

For more information please contact:

Massimiliano Sani, Regional Adviser, Social and Behaviour Change (OIC)
UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa

masani@unicef.org
www.unicef.org

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