

UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Region

SBC Works!

Partnership with HelpAge International to promote vaccine equity and access for older people in Tanzania



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

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed real gaps in data on older people and a lack of prioritization of OP in traditional immunization systems, making it more difficult to include them in the response. The Government of Tanzania set an ambitious goal of reaching 70 per cent of COVID-19 vaccination by June 2022. Achieving this goal required overcoming significant challenges. In addition to addressing barriers to access, the Government of Tanzania and UNICEF Tanzania prioritized interventions to increase demand for vaccination amongst those most at risk, including older people.

HelpAge International has the unique mandate of working with older people and a pre-existing strong relationship with the Government and communities at the national and local levels. Therefore, UNICEF decided to partner with HelpAge International to engage older people and promote community-led COVID-19 prevention and vaccination. Initially starting with 2 regions of Mwanza and Kigoma in November 2021, UNICEF has extended coverage to 5 more regions (Simiyu, Njombe, Tanga, Kagera and Shinyanga) by September 2022.

SBC Actions

Targeting to get 18,650 older people in 5 regions of Mwanza, Kigoma, Simiyu, Ruvuma and Tanga vaccinated by September 2022, UNICEF Tanzania partnered with HelpAge International to implement the following interventions:

- Facilitating Older People Associations (OPAs) to lead community dialogues from districts to village level. These are intergenerational dialogues that bring together different groups of community members to exchange their views and opinions in an open and safe environment, with the aim to change the community's negative perceptions, attitudes, wrong myths and negative beliefs about the COVID-19 vaccine.



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

2 [Journey to Health and Immunization](#)



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- Mobilizing home-based care providers (HBCP), village health workers (VHWs) and Active Ageing Clubs (AACs) to disseminate accurate information on COVID-19 vaccination and facilitate delivery of vaccines to people with special needs including home-bound persons with mobility challenges, people with disabilities and remote communities with no access to health information.
- Supporting older people and people with disabilities with vaccine registration and reaching vaccination points via mobile sites, ensuring they do not miss their second dose. Following up on their vaccine registration cards and/or records was important to remind them of their next appointment and organize mobile vaccination from the nearby health facility.
- To mitigate challenges older people face in accessing vaccines, including ageism, low literacy, limited exposure to media, obstacles in health-seeking behaviour, and isolation, HelpAge International organized additional peer-to-peer discussions and paired youth with older people and leveraged these interactions to overcome access-related challenges. This intergenerational model applied by HelpAge International helped clarify misinformation, myths and negative perceptions related to COVID-19 vaccines among older people, youth, people with disabilities and middle-aged women.

Results

The rate of vaccination increased from 7,830 to 16,254 (108% increase) among older people and from 1,670 to 2,802 (68% increase) among people with a disability between December 2021 and February

2022 in the regions of Kigoma and Mwanza. By September 2022, a total of 262,839 people (33,820 older people, 2,130 people with disability, 164,543 adults, 62,336 youths) had received vaccination in the program areas through outreach services targeting in particular homebound people, people with co-morbidities and those with physical challenges.

Over 421,038 people were reached with accurate information on COVID-19 through community dialogues, community meetings and outreach services by HBCs, VHWs and AACs.

Over 2,000 people from 80 elderly forums-OPAs, 25 women's groups and 20 youth groups were trained to promote COVID-19 preventive measures, collect community feedback and respond.

A weekly online meeting was held among HelpAge International, National Older People Forum leaders and the social welfare department of the Ministry of Community Development Gender, Women and Special Groups (MCDGWSP), chaired by the Minister (Hon. Doroth Gwajima) to give updates and resolve various issues regarding older people welfare. HelpAge International used the avenues to provide the update on the COVID-19 vaccine progress in the 5 regions under the UNICEF funding support. As a feedback mechanism, the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) team was established at the regional and district levels where the project was being implemented. HelpAge International networks with civil society organizations (CSOs) also facilitated the exchange of best practices with regions that were not part of the project, helping to strengthen preventive measures focused on elderly needs across the country.

Lessons & way forward



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- Reaching older people is crucial, not only because they are at higher risk of COVID-19 and require lifesaving information on vaccination, but also because they are well-respected pillars in communities and can be effective agents of change.
- Community dialogues coupled with high-level support from district leaders were vital to build trust and successfully promoting vaccine uptake among the elderly community. Peer-to-peer communication and intergenerational dialogues enable a holistic approach on COVID-19. These dialogues sparked empathy and increased motivation to get vaccinated and practice preventive measures among young people.
- HelpAge International has a trusted in-country reputation. Their existing community-based networks have been effective for monitoring and feedback purposes, as well as for advocacy towards the Government for increased investment in targeted approaches.
- Mobile vaccination is essential in addressing vaccine equity and access for hard-to-reach individuals, such as those living in remote rural areas, older people and people living with disability.
- There are opportunities to expand these programmes beyond COVID-19 vaccination, for example, looking at cholera and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The high prevalence of NCDs in older people has caused some hesitation to be vaccinated, despite evidence of the benefits of COVID-19 vaccination outweighing the risks.
- Increasing the reach of vaccination to older people has the added benefit of strengthening the interaction with the health system, which represents an opportunity for further integration of services to better reach these populations, including prevention and management of NCDs.



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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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