



Expanding COVID-19 Testing and Treatment in Littoral, Cameroon: Catalyzing COVID-19 Action

Providing COVID-19 testing and treatment to Cameroon's vulnerable population is important to responding to the COVID-19 epidemic. The Bangue District has a population of about 385,000 people and lies within Cameroon's Littoral Region, which has about 5.7 million. Recognizing the lack of demand for COVID-19 testing in Littoral communities, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) conducted a formative assessment in December 2021 to better understand why people were not getting tested and vaccinated. They selected the Bangue health district, with high number of COVID-19 cases, to conduct community-level formative assessment and promotion of COVID-19 testing and treatment services.

The EGPAF Catalyzing COVID-19 Action (CCA) project team interviewed key Cameroonian community leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders, health district leaders, and community health workers (CHWs) to understand communities' perceptions concerning COVID-19. The formative assessment gave insight into why Littoral residents were hesitant about receiving testing and vaccines. Reasons for hesitancy included: a belief that COVID-19 is a disease only for white Westerners; testing is only needed to travel; and concerns that Westerners put ingredients in vaccines to infect Africans with COVID-19.

In June 2022, the CCA team at EGPAF in Cameroon collaborated with the district lead to conduct a three-day campaign in the seven health areas of Bangue district to inform residents on the benefits of COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination. The team comprised CHWs for sensitization and linkage-to-care, nurses to offer COVID-19 screening and vaccination, a lab tech for testing, and a medical district officer to provide treatment for those with COVID-19. Meanwhile, the Cameroonian Ministry of Health (MOH) was determined to scale up the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out across the country. Thus, trained MOH CHWs supplemented the EGPAF CCA team's efforts.

The EGPAF team used a "test-anyone" model; testing any community member, regardless of symptoms, to identify and link anyone to care should they test positive for COVID-19. To target high catchment/density areas, the team deployed to markets, stadiums, bus stations, and outside churches and mosques during high-traffic days, including Friday through Sunday. The CCA team produced flyers and distributed them in these areas. They also used a megaphone to amplify key sensitization messages in the community. Of 360 tested, three were positive for COVID-19 and of those, two were asymptomatic. Moreover, 33 community members were vaccinated.

LITTORAL REGION 3 DAY COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN

15,958

number of people sensitized

3

number of people positive and put on treatment

360

number of people tested

33

number of people vaccinated

The outreach event was deemed a success by the District's medical officer, Dr. Nadine Nanga:

- › *The partnership with EGPAF made this activity possible in that the district's limitations were met by the partner and the district on its side invested in making available what it could and facilitating collaboration with community leaders and the authorities. It was a pleasant experience and the results clearly show that...it was the first time the district had conducted a targeted activity in gathering places such as churches, mosques, and markets; it really was a first. In fact, we have replicated this strategy for the current cholera campaigns."*

The CHWs were vital to outreach efforts. Their messaging—that people should get tested and vaccinated to help protect their families and vulnerable members of their community—was convincing. Additionally, CHWs encouraged people who tested positive for COVID-19 to adhere to treatment and isolation recommendations.

Dr. Nadine attributed the success of the project to CHWs, as well, stating:

- › *"We did not expect to have the [positive] result we had with regard to vaccination, knowing the resistance associated with this service. It's proof that when you have a good message that captures the attention of the population and a good channel to convey it, you can reach the entire population anywhere."*

This outreach project helped challenge preconceptions and contradict misinformation about COVID-19 in the Littoral region of Cameroon. The team's activities improved access to accurate information and knowledge about COVID-19 and increased access to testing and vaccines. The CCA team at EGPAF in Cameroon believes continued outreach activities are vital to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, educating the community, creating awareness, and supporting COVID-19 testing and vaccination services.



CHW providing COVID-19 testing near a bus station.

Photo by: Oliver Xavier Mbezele/EGPAF, 2022



CHW providing testing in the community.

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