

# Using Community Listening to Address COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy in Nigeria

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Addressing vaccine confidence and acceptance

## CHALLENGE

In Nigeria, vaccine hesitancy has been a public health challenge and especially in the rural communities. This serves as barriers to uptake of vaccination as well as other primary health services. To understand the depth of some enhancers to vaccine hesitancy it became imperative to listen actively to the community. Community Listening (CL) aids in gauging public opinion on a subject in preparation for a targeted message or intervention. To understand the COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in a rural communities in Kebbi state Nigeria, Breakthrough ACTION Nigeria (BA-N) with the Government conducted CL sessions to understand drivers of vaccine hesitancy and acceptance.

## INNOVATION

BA-N implemented a CL approach in Kebbi state under five themes using the UNICEF journey to immunization roadmap that includes Knowledge and Awareness, Acceptance and Motivation, Intention to Seek Care, Seeking Care, and After Service satisfaction. Discussions were held among vaccinated and unvaccinated groups of people on their perception about the vaccine. Audio recorded discussions were transcribed and coding performed to align emerging themes with predetermined ones.

## RESULTS/OUTCOMES

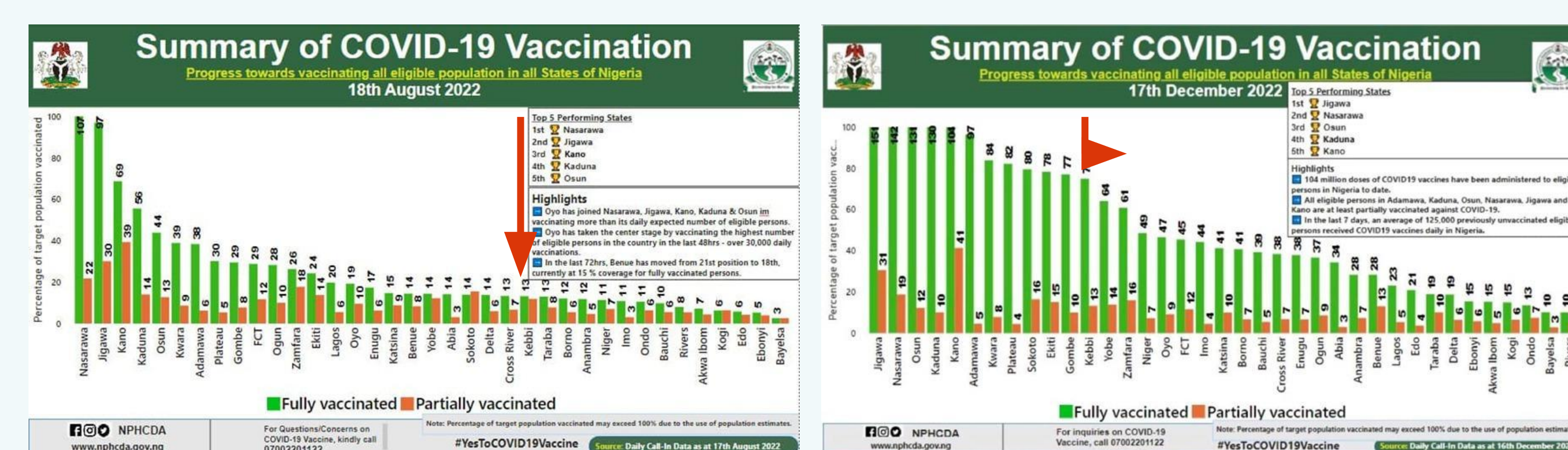
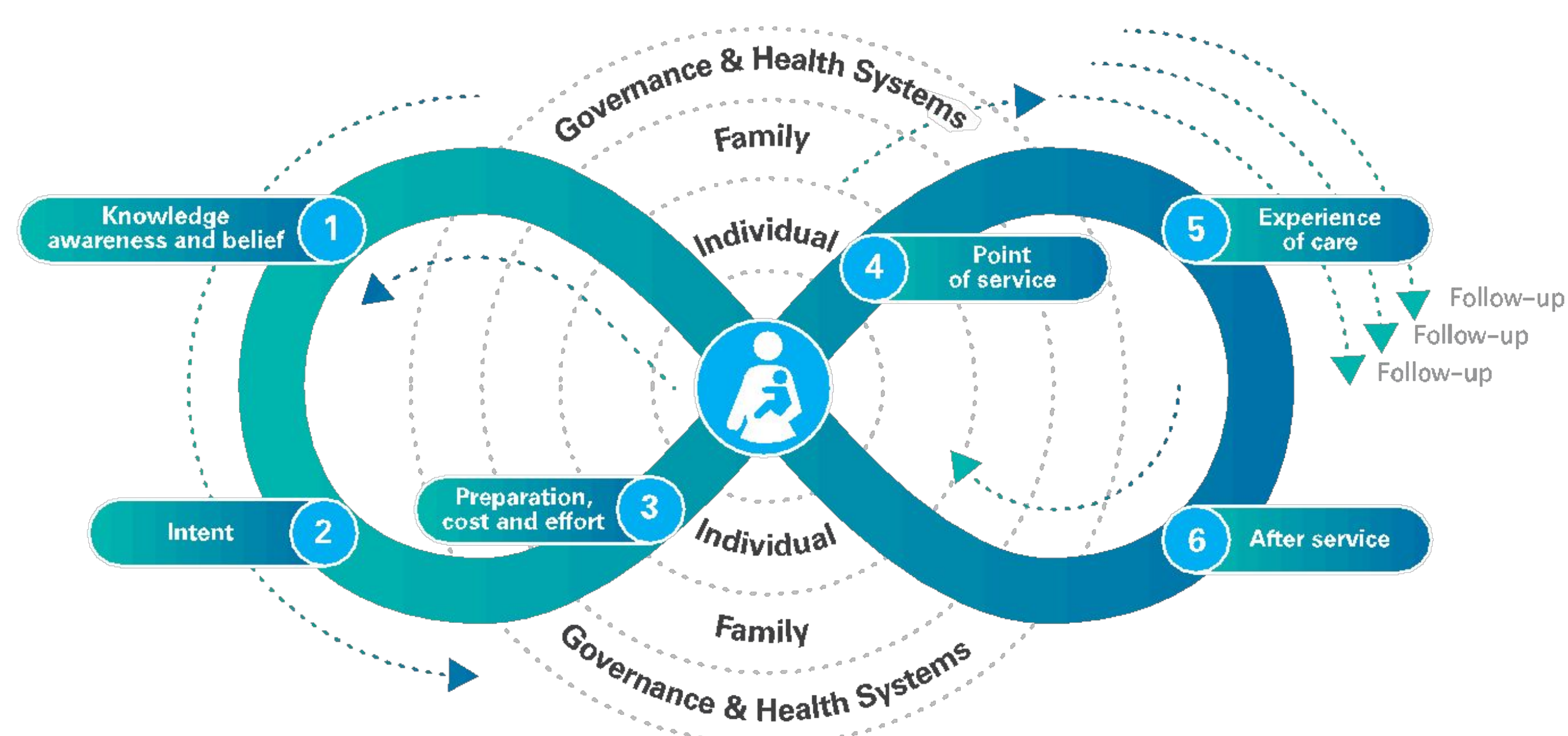
The impact of the CL sessions on COVID-19 vaccination was significant as the findings from the discussions and analysis of the recorded sessions provided valuable insights into the community's perceptions and concerns about the vaccines which includes: poor understanding of vaccine benefits, concerns about vaccine safety, misinformation about side effects, and mistrust in government and donors' intentions regarding the vaccine.

These were addressed through the development of targeted social and behavior change (SBC) materials and messages using emotive and local languages. In addition, trusted voices were engaged as messengers to deliver the messages in the different communities and across different channels including mass media.

As a result, the intervention led to a remarkable increase in COVID-19 vaccination rates in Kebbi state as the vaccination rate rose from 13% in August to 75% in December 2022. This positive shift can be attributed to the effective communication after engagement with the community during the CL sessions and linkage with service provision.

By addressing the community's specific concerns and disseminating accurate information through SBC approaches, the intervention successfully reduced perceived vaccine hesitancy. The CL approach not only increased awareness and understanding of the vaccine's benefits but also helped dispel misinformation and build trust in the vaccination process.

### UNICEF'S JOURNEY TO IMMUNIZATION



## APPLICATION TO ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION OR PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Community Listening (CL) is an innovative approach that can be adapted for Routine Immunization (RI) or Primary Health Care (PHC) services. It involves conducting CL sessions to understand community acceptance and attitudes towards healthcare services. Through these sessions, healthcare providers can identify barriers and concerns, inform message development, train community volunteers, collaborate with stakeholders, and monitor the impact of CL-based interventions. By incorporating CL into RI/PHC services, healthcare providers can address community-specific challenges, enhance communication, build trust, and improve healthcare outcomes and vaccination rates. Furthermore, it shows how UNICEF's journey to immunization can be adapted for community level SBC and service delivery interventions.