

U.S. SUPPORT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE CONTRIBUTES TO STEADY RISE IN VACCINATIONS

COVID-19 vaccination campaign, paired with intensive efforts to drive demand and increase access, helped boost first dose vaccinations in Cote d'Ivoire from 22 percent to 36 percent in December 2021

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CÔTE D'IVOIRE VACCINATION UPTAKE

With the onset of COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire in March 2020, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire (GoCI) and the U.S. Government (USG) immediately leveraged existing [Global Health Security Agenda](#) (GHSA) platforms. National GHSA technical working groups (TWGs) quickly shifted to strengthening existing systems and structures for the COVID-19 response. Key focus areas included improving risk communication, coordination and micro-planning, infection prevention and control, supply chain and logistics, cold chain capacity, and transportation of COVID-19 vaccines to decentralized areas. In the face of low national vaccination rates, the government of Cote d'Ivoire set an ambitious goal of administering 2.5 million vaccinations over one month in December 2021. Recognizing that vaccine hesitancy was a major barrier to uptake, the USG and partners supported a GoCI-led vaccination campaign, paired with national radio messaging to address COVID-19 misinformation. In one month, these efforts drove coverage against national targets from 22 percent to 36 percent of eligible Ivorians receiving at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO REDUCE COVID-19 MISINFORMATION

Misinformation and rumors have proven challenging to tackling COVID-19 in Côte d'Ivoire. The USG, in coordination with the GoCI, has supported risk communication as an essential component of COVID-19 mitigation efforts and a cornerstone of vaccination uptake. Among the key USG projects has been USAID's [Breakthrough ACTION](#) project, which works on creative and sustainable social and behavior change programming. With funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Breakthrough ACTION has supported the GoCI's COVID-19 response through technical and financial assistance to the Ministry of Health. The project adapted a previously developed Rumor-tracking Management System (RMS) to collect, analyze, and address harmful COVID-19 rumors in real time and to develop targeted messaging to counter misinformation. Widespread rumors—consistent with misinformation around suspicions on case counts and the belief that masks were deliberately contaminated—were submitted through community-based contributors and collected from callers to the national hotlines.

Examples of rumors collected through the monitoring system:

"Dangerous vaccine intended to spread the disease on the continent"

"It's known that people who have been vaccinated in France are dying"

"They are increasing the cases of COVID-19 to force us to take the vaccine"

Qualitative findings¹ have provided rapid insights on circulating beliefs, enabling risk communicators to tailor COVID-19 messaging. Breakthrough ACTION supported the GoCI to develop a dynamic communication strategy to bolster demand for vaccines and combat COVID-19 myths and misinformation. Meanwhile, the GoCI national vaccination data, including disaggregated results by age, sex, and geography, enabled key actors to identify populations and areas lagging in vaccination uptake. The project targeted priority groups (such as health workers, military personnel, and the elderly) through multi-faceted media campaigns, community engagement, and support for the national health hotline. In addition, USAID supported public communication by training and engaging the Professional Network of Science Journalists to develop media content incorporating vaccine messages and publish articles and content addressing COVID-19 vaccine-related issues on social media and other communication channels.

RUMOR MITIGATION SUPPORTS VACCINE DEMAND

Soon after the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines in Côte d'Ivoire in March 2021, the RMS noted persistent rumors regarding their safety and the possible negative effects of the vaccines, including sterility. Following emerging patterns, Breakthrough ACTION worked with the National Risk Communication (RC) TWG to develop messaging for local television and radio that addressed the themes Ivorians are most concerned about. These efforts, paired with USG-supported COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, coincided with a steady improvement in vaccine confidence and an increase in demand for COVID-19 vaccinations. By late October 2021, the number of vaccine doses administered was over 3.2 million and, by the end of the year, over 2 million Ivorians, or 36 percent, had received at least one dose,² compared to an average of 14 percent on the African continent.³



POSTER DEPICTING KEY EXAMPLES OF HOW PEOPLE IN COTE D'IVOIRE CAN WORK AGAINST COVID-19. DEVELOPED BY USAID'S BREAKTHROUGH ACTION PROJECT.

REACHING PRIORITY GROUPS THROUGH TARGETED MESSAGING AND CAMPAIGNS

Given the persistence of rumors and misinformation around mask-wearing and other preventative measures confirmed through the RMS, and anticipating increased travel and social events around the holidays, Breakthrough ACTION also supported the RC TWG to develop an intensive radio campaign in advance of the holiday period. Messages reminded Ivorians of the effectiveness and importance of practicing available preventative measures in conjunction with vaccination. This messaging push aired over a two-week period on 21 local radio stations (18 community and 3 religious) in Abidjan and surrounding regions. In parallel, during the month of December 2021, the GoCI with support from the USG, conducted a successful COVID-19 vaccination campaign to administer 2.5 million vaccinations nationally. By the end of December, the campaign, supported by these combined USG efforts, resulted in over 2.3 million individuals being vaccinated, achieving 93 percent of the target. This effort increased coverage against national targets from 22 percent to 36 percent of the eligible population receiving at least one dose and 10 percent to 15 percent being fully vaccinated. Among the most targeted groups nationally, 87 percent of health workers, 99 percent of military personnel, and 85 percent of the elderly have received at least one COVID-19 vaccination dose.

SUCCESS POSSIBLE WITH CONTINUED COLLABORATION

Continuing efforts of USG support to the GoCI include approaches that optimize use of the broader USG platforms, including the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Presidential Malaria Initiative (PMI), as well as GHSA. Specific areas of emphasis include further strengthening data collection and use for decision-making as well as more focused demand creation and outreach efforts to improve vaccination coverage among the hard-to-reach sub-populations. Through continued USG support, the GoCI is well placed to rapidly implement programming to drive demand and access for COVID-19 vaccinations and achieve the national goal of vaccinating 70 percent of the targeted population, contributing towards overall global vaccination goals.

¹ A qualitative study conducted by Breakthrough ACTION on COVID-19 vaccines hesitancy in Côte d'Ivoire (Nov 2020) identified key drivers of vaccine hesitancy: (a) uncertainty about vaccine safety; (b) low confidence in vaccine development and distribution systems; (c) widespread belief in conspiracy theories

² Côte d'Ivoire Vaccination Program Data - before the campaign (as of 1st December, 2021)

³ Our World in Data. "Share of people who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine" (as of Dec 31, 2021).

[https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?zoomToSelection=true&time=earliest.2021-12-](https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?zoomToSelection=true&time=earliest.2021-12-31&facet=none&pickerSort=asc&pickerMetric=location&Metric=People+vaccinated&Interval=Cumulative&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=~Africa)

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