Promoting Research Equity and Participation Through Community Engagement: Lessons Learned from the PREVAIL InVITE Study in Liberia

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The Global Health Network Conference 2022, University of Cape Town, South Africa
WHO issued first emergency use validation for a COVID-19 vaccine

Dec. 2020

Mar. 2021

Liberia received the first consignment of COVID-19 vaccines - 96,000 doses received through the COVAX initiative

Mar. 2021

Liberia officially launched COVID-19 vaccination campaign

Apr. 2021

Aug. 2021

23 Aug. 2021

PREVAIL launched the InVITE study

Aug. 2021

Participants enrollment commenced
Background

- **InVITE** is the international study on COVID-19 vaccines to:
  - Assess immunogenicity and vaccine durability in people who received an initial or booster COVID vaccine regimen based on local guidelines
  - Detect SARS-CoV-2 infections post vaccination (breakthrough infection)
  - Conducted across multiple sites in the following countries:
    - Indonesia
    - Guinea
    - Mali
    - Democratic Republic of the Congo
    - Mexico
    - Mongolia
    - Liberia
  - In Liberia, the study is implemented by PREVAIL
  - PREVAIL is a Liberia-US joint partnership established in 2015 during the 2013-2016 Ebola epidemic
Early enrollment rates (Liberia): August – October 2021

- Male 147
- Female 91

- National data also showed discordance in COVID-19 vaccination rates across Montserrado County
# National Vaccination Data (Montserrado county)  
April – August 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-Apr</td>
<td>1633</td>
<td>840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-May</td>
<td>3377</td>
<td>2182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-Jun</td>
<td>2608</td>
<td>1507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-Jul</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-Aug</td>
<td>21353</td>
<td>11810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>29493</td>
<td>16659</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **April-August Total**
  - Male: 64%  
  - Female: 36%
Methods

PREVAIL Intervention to Address Gender Discordance

Advocacy & Community Engagement Meetings:

- Meeting with local leaders and community influencers to solicit buy-in
- Community leaders and PREVAIL/MOH team organized small group meetings in identified
- Over 200 community members (mostly women) participated in these engagements

Media Engagements:

- Radio talk shows on community radio stations to provide public education on the importance of the PREVAIL InVITE study
- Engagements focused on enhancing community knowledge and acceptance of COVID-19 vaccines in general and recruitment for the PREVAIL InVITE study
- These activities were implemented from October to November 2021
Methods
Results and Conclusions

Perceived Barriers to Women Participation:
- Lack of access to COVID-19 vaccination information
- Inadequate education/awareness on the risk (if any) and benefits of taking the vaccine
- Health concerns
- Lack of active community involvement in rolling out the COVID-19 vaccines
- Family responsibilities
- Limited mobility to reach health facilities or vaccination sites
Results and Conclusions

Outcome of Stakeholders Engagement & Community Outreach

- During the community outreach activities, 199 (95%) community members received the COVID-19 vaccine on spot.
- 82 vaccinated individuals enrolled in the InVITE study (76% female).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of engagement</th>
<th>Number vaccinated on spot by EPI</th>
<th>Number enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-Nov</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-Nov</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-Nov</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-Nov</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results and Conclusions

Direct Impact on Enrollment

Enrollment by gender: August - December 2021

- Augt - Sept, 2021
  - Cumulative male enrollment: 115 (66%)
  - Cumulative female enrollment: 59 (34%)

- Oct - Dec, 2021
  - Cumulative male enrollment: 100 (44%)
  - Cumulative female enrollment: 129 (56%)

Period:
- Augt - Sept, 2021
- Oct - Dec, 2021

Legend:
- Cumulative male enrollment
- Cumulative female enrollment
Results and Conclusions

Overall Impact

• Helped to increase community understanding and acceptance of COVID-19 vaccines in Liberia

• Improved recruitment and retention for the PREVAIL InVITE study
  • Total enrollment – 700 participants (August 2021 – April 2022)

• Enhanced inclusion and equal participation across gender

• Strengthened local partnership, participation and ownership

InVITE Study: total enrollment

- 45% Male
- 55% Female

National C-19 Vaccination Data: Gender Disaggregation

- Male 51%
- Female 49%
Recommendations

• Gender-based barriers must be addressed in the planning and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines; planning and implementation of COVID-19 vaccine research

• Women have special needs - listen to their concerns and seek to understand how vulnerabilities could become barriers

• Research and public health interventions must adopt a gender lens, one size does not always fit all

• Pandemic response must consider gender-context-specific channels and sources for trusted health information – the message and messenger are equally important

• Low uptake is not necessarily the product of hesitancy, uptake measures must be contextualized
Community engagement must inculcate the concepts of:

- **RESPECT**
  - Respecting the views and interests of stakeholders

- **LEARNING**
  - Provides rich insights into people’s experiences, views and concerns
  - Opportunity to reflect on what was/was not working, and why

- **ACCOUNTABILITY**
  - Identifying and engaging the right stakeholders improves accountability with host communities

- **TRUST**
  - Participatory stakeholders engagement is critical to building lasting credibility and trust – in research team(s), products and interventions
Acknowledgements

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