

Mass Measles Campaign 2003: *Partnering to Immunise Children*

Patrick Sserumaga, age 5, son of Paul Sserumaga



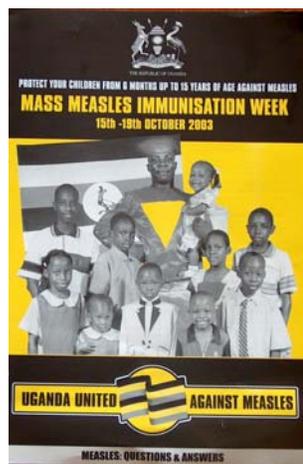
“In the future, I want my children to be educated and read books so that they can have a bright future and stand on their own. I want my children to be disciplined, moral and good socially so that they can interact with peers and elders well. I want my children to be very healthy.”

Paul Sserumaga’s dreams for his children are not different from the dreams of most parents around the world; however, Mr. Sserumaga, who lives in the Wakiso District in Uganda, knows that there are many obstacles to his children fulfilling those dreams. The very real concern of diseases like measles is one such obstacle. He explains that, “Before I had my children, measles used to be very rampant and a serious killer disease. I knew that when I had my kids, it would be important to immunize them.”

Measles is the fourth most common cause of death among Ugandan children. In 2003, measles immunisation coverage was 77%, below the required 95% coverage to attain mass immunity. In response, the Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (UNEPI) launched the Uganda National Measles Immunisation Campaign (UNMIC) in October 2003 with partners, including the USAID-funded Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development (UPHOLD) Program. The campaign aimed to reach children ages 6 months to 15 years with measles vaccination, de-worming, and vitamin A supplementation.

This was the most successful national measles vaccination ever in Uganda. Previous immunisation programs were hampered by negative perceptions of immunisation. UPHOLD understood that a measles immunisation campaign could only succeed if parents and children received accurate information about the campaign from credible sources. To counter misconceptions, fear and lack of knowledge, UPHOLD supported UNEPI by assisting Government and donor partners to develop an effective multisectoral communication strategy for the measles campaign. The campaign ran for six weeks, from September 2003 and until Immunisation Week, from October 15 and 19.

UPHOLD assisted partners to develop a range of strategic communications materials to publicize the campaign and motivate participation.



UPHOLD helped partners develop an effective creative concept for the campaign. “Mr. Immuniser,” a super hero who protects children from immunisable diseases, became the symbol for the campaign in all media. Parents and children alike appreciated. Mr. Immuniser, who continues to be used to promote routine immunisation activities.



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UPHOLD engaged the private sector, for the first time in a national campaign in Uganda, to carry out market research to develop and test strategies and materials.

Communication aimed to expose threats of the disease and promote benefits of immunisation. Prior to Immunisation Week, letters, leaflets, posters and stickers promoting measles vaccinations were displayed throughout Uganda, and UPHOLD coordinated a national mass media schedule using newspaper, radio and television advertisements. Over 14,000 spots aired during the media campaign. 54 advertisements were placed in national and regional newspapers, making print the secondary media tool for the campaign, and TV was tertiary, with 52 spots.

The mass measles campaign succeeded. The campaign vaccinated over 14 million children, achieving **95% measles immunisation coverage** in 47 of 56 Districts. Vitamin A supplementation coverage was estimated at 100% and de-worming coverage at 85%.

Communications efforts played an important role in the success of the campaign. People who came for vaccinations during Immunisation Week were asked how they learned of the program. Almost 99% of Ugandans heard a radio announcement, 56% read about it in a newspaper, and 40% saw an advertisement on television. "I had been made aware of the campaign through the radio announcements," explained Steven, a father in Wakiso District. "Generally, the campaign was well-publicized through posters, local leaders, radio newspapers, banners, and t-shirts."

The campaign's multisectoral strategy for a community-oriented approach to sensitization was highly successful and translated to positive attitudes toward vaccination. John Omviti, a Public Health Dental Officer in Arua District who participated in the campaign felt that the cooperation between health workers and communities was key. "We reduced rampant sickness of children in the communities since the measles vaccination increased immunity. It improved the health status of children. Now they have good health." This perception is matched by reality. Since the campaign, measles wards in hospitals have closed; the Ministry of Health has only identified 80 cases in the country.



Children themselves helped to mobilize participation. Econi, 13-year-old boy in Arua District brought six of his friends and siblings after getting vaccinated himself. He explained to his friends that it didn't hurt and that it was important for their health. He is shown above displaying his certificate of good work from UPHOLD.



The achievement of UPHOLD, UNEPI and other partners is best measured in the reactions of the parents whose children were vaccinated. "Now I have peace of mind," explains Paul Sserumaga. "Even if I don't have money, I am confident I will save that which I would have spent on measles treatment for my children. My kids are healthy and growing fast." The Mass Measles Campaign contributed to helping Paul Sserumaga and other parents realize their dreams for their children.

