



Photo source: <https://www.gavi.org/closer-than-ever-to-a-polio-free-nigeria> Photo by Gavi/Adrian Brooks

POLICY BRIEF

Implementing Community Engagement in Nigeria: Addressing Constraints and Maximizing Opportunities





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IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: ADDRESSING CONSTRAINTS AND MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Key findings

- Community engagement has been widely accepted as a tool to foster communities' participation in health promotion activities, increase acceptance to health interventions and promote sustainability of the program.
- The implementing organization's planning process and the convictions held by the communities are crucial factors to be considered for a successful community engagement activity.
- The funding process of the health intervention is a major constraint to be considered while implementing community engagement activities.
- Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research is a valuable instrument for evaluating implementation of health intervention strategies.
- Ensuring that community engagement implementers address these highlighted issues early on will ultimately increase the chances of success of the strategy.

Background

Community engagement is the practice of developing partnerships with members of the community, donors and interest groups to work together as long-term allies to develop a network of support for a variety of initiatives, services, and service issues with the overall aim of improving community members' well being ¹

Why does community engagement matter?

It is difficult to implement any health intervention without support from communities. Through community engagement, community members play meaningful roles in the deliberations, decisions and/or implementation of health projects and programs affecting them. It empowers members of the community to learn about their health and increases the probability that projects and/or solutions will be widely accepted. Moreover, community engagement increases the level of trust between communities, local and federal governments and bridges the gap by connecting people who are not currently part of the direct constituency ²

The use of community engagement approach in the polio campaign has contributed significantly in Nigeria's polio eradication project. It has enabled the citizens to understand the processes of the government towards improving the health of the population ³ This strategy was used to address misconceptions that led to the state-wide rejection of the polio vaccine in North-East Nigeria.

Methods

The evidence for this study was from 364 respondents including Program Managers, Policymakers, Researchers and Frontline field implementers affiliated with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) core partner organizations. The survey was administered online through a web-based data collection platform-Qualtrics. The instrument, informed by the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) framework, ⁴ was organized into two themes (contributors and constraints) that reflected the respondents' experiences with implementing community engagement activities.

Findings

Contribution to the implementation of community engagement

The process of conducting the PEI program 154(45%) was the most reported internal contributor to implementing community engagement activities in the community (figure 1). The social environment 186(56%) and the political factors 88(26%) within the communities were the most frequently external reported contributors to the community engagement activities. The economic factors 55(16%) also contributed to the success of community engagement (Figure 2).

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3. Hammanyero KI, Bawa S, Braka F, Bassey BE, Fatiregun A, Warigon C, Yehualashet YG, Tegene SG, Banda R, Korir C: Lessons learnt from implementing community engagement interventions in mobile hard-to-reach (HTR) projects in Nigeria, 2014–2015. BMC Public Health 2018, 18(4):1306.

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Constraints to the implementation of community engagement

The external environment – elements outside the control of health workers - 182(50.0%) was the most notable constraints to community engagement activities. This is followed by the process of conducting the PEI program 84(23.1%) and the characteristics of people involved in the polio eradication activities 82(22.5%) Figure 3.

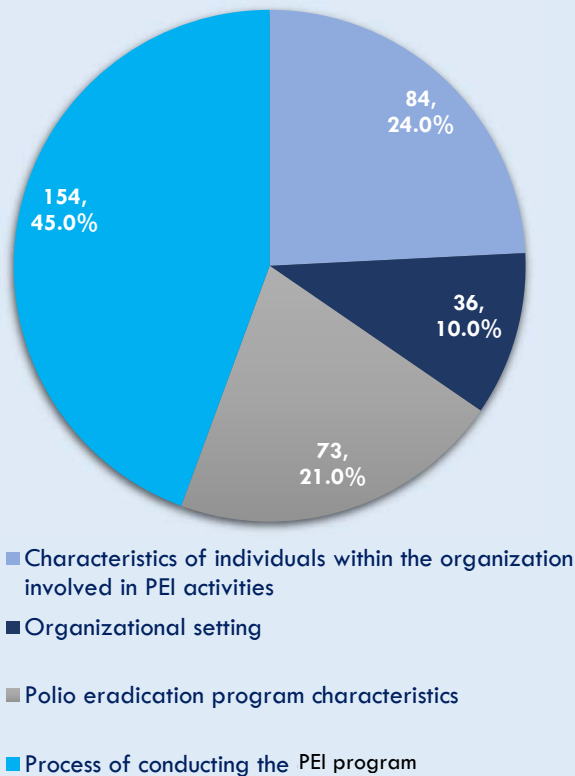


Figure 1: Internal contributors to the implementation of community engagement activities

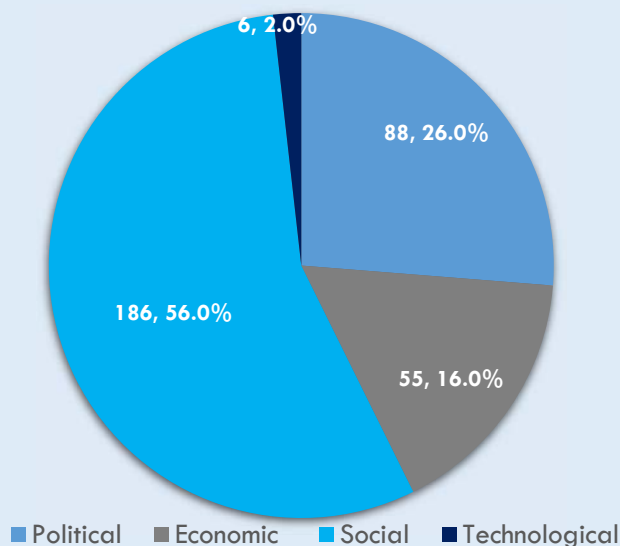


Figure 2: External contributors to the implementation of community engagement

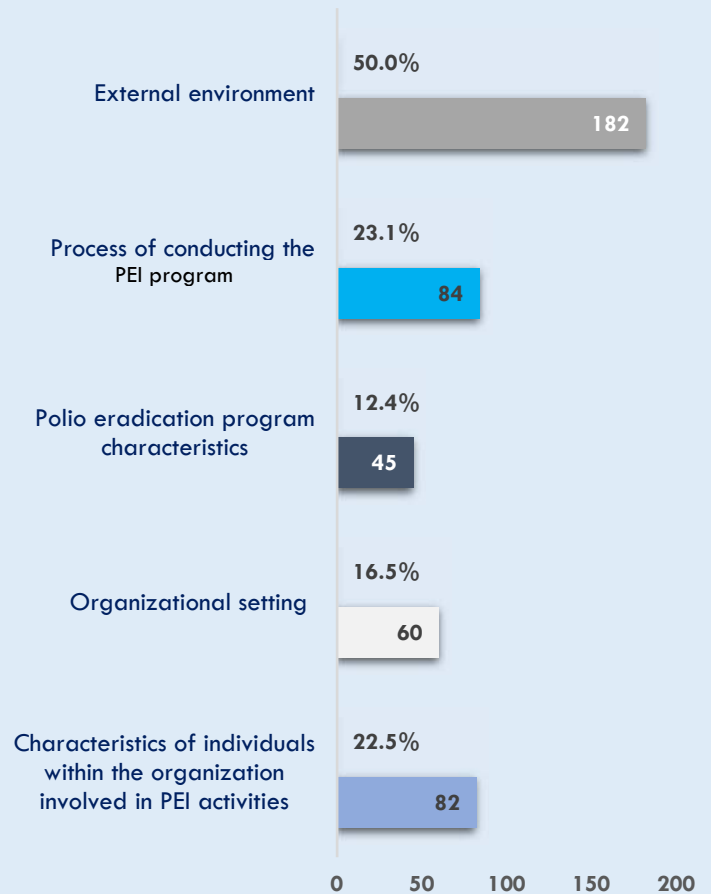


Figure 3: Constraints to the implementation of community engagement

Strategies for action

- **Create a secure and trusting environment that enables members of the community to provide feedback**

Creating spaces where community members feel relaxed to put forward ideas is critical to any health program's success. Engagement mechanisms and practice should be adjusted to suit communities' needs and organizations should take steps to reduce cultural barriers to enable their full involvement. For example, holding meetings and activities when convenient for community members and ensuring activities are culturally sensitive.

- **Ensure community members' early involvement**

Where possible, health programmers should engage community members in the planning stages of the intervention. They should be involved in the identification and prioritization of their own health care needs. In doing so, health programmers would ensure that their priorities and definitions of health are aligned with those of the community.

- **Conduct local evaluation of situations, attitudes and opportunities concerning the intervention**

To best choose and implement engagement programs, communities and organizations must be aware of where the community stands on the health issue being addressed. Without this assessment, community engagement initiatives may not reflect local realities.

- **Collaborate with community members and leverage on their skills**

Communities and organizations must be open to collaborate with community members in different capacities.

- **Create a national guideline for community engagement**

A national guideline for community engagement will enhance involvement of communities during implementation of health interventions.

- **Sufficient allocation to community engagement activities**

Health implementers should provide sufficient funds for community engagement activities, this will facilitate optimal community participation and potential success of the program.



Photo source: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/nasililiza/making-progress-towards-polio-eradication-in-nigeria-despite-boko-haram>

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