

Empowering our communities through social mobilisation to advance demand for HPV vaccination

Edina Amponsah-Dacosta, Ph.D., MPH





Josiah with his daughter,
Annabel



Josiah is considering the HPV vaccine for Anna...

Josiah's "why" ...



- A colleague shared her recent cervical cancer diagnosis
- Her oncologist admitted that her cancer could have been prevented if she'd had access to the HPV vaccine as an adolescent

What does Josiah know so far?

Google

HPV and cervical cancer|

hpv and cervical cancer

hpv and cervical cancer risk

hpv and cervical cancer statistics

hpv and cervical cancer rates

- HPV can be transmitted through sexual contact
- HPV is a major cause of cervical cancer
- Every 90sec, a woman dies of cervical cancer
- Cervical cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer-related death among women in Africa
- HPV vaccine is recommended for pre-adolescent girls as cervical cancer prevention





Political will

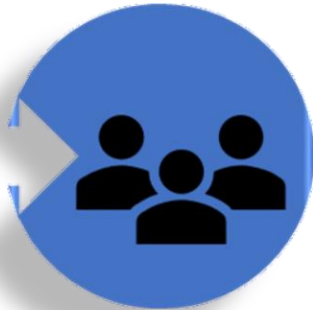
Affordability of the vaccine



Policy guiding vaccine implementation



Capacity / capability of healthcare providers



Availability of vaccine

Community engagement & social mobilisation

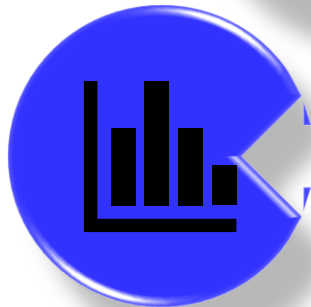


Anna needs to get the HPV vaccine NOW!



Quality of service delivery

Availability / quality of data



Community engagement and social mobilization

- Reflects our **value system for the communities we serve**
- Not just behavioural change BUT
 - **Raising awareness** about the importance of HPV vaccination
 - **Empowering communities** with all the information they need to make sound choices about HPV vaccination
- Working closely with **key stakeholders** to drive HPV vaccine acceptance
 - Adolescent girls and their peers & role models, parents and caregivers, teachers, opinion leaders, religious and cultural influencers, academics, all cadres of healthcare workers...EVERYONE
- Crucial in addressing societal, cultural, religious, and other barriers to HPV vaccine acceptance



Why community engagement and social mobilization?

- Public demand for the HPV vaccine is influenced by their level of **knowledge, awareness, and attitudes**
- The vaccine is only lifesaving if the target population make an informed decision to accept it
 - Bi-directional, continuous dialogues with communities
 - Enhance trust in broader health systems



Priority gaps and challenges

- Low level of public awareness fuels **misconceptions** about the safety and benefits of the HPV vaccine
 - ⊗ promiscuity and early sexual debut
 - ⊗ Infertility
 - ⊗ death
 - ⊗ prevent HIV
 - ⊗ Improve fertility
- Challenges faced by our health workforce
 - Poor access to appropriate, continuous training
 - Limited knowledge and confidence in the safety and benefits of the HPV vaccine
 - Negatively impacts their acceptance of the vaccine
 - Affects their ability to recommend the vaccine to their clients

Key dimensions of community engagement and social mobilization strategies

- Education and communication about HPV infection, cervical cancer, and HPV vaccination
- Meaningful community partnerships throughout the HPV vaccination program



Successes and opportunities for our national HPV vaccination program

How it started...

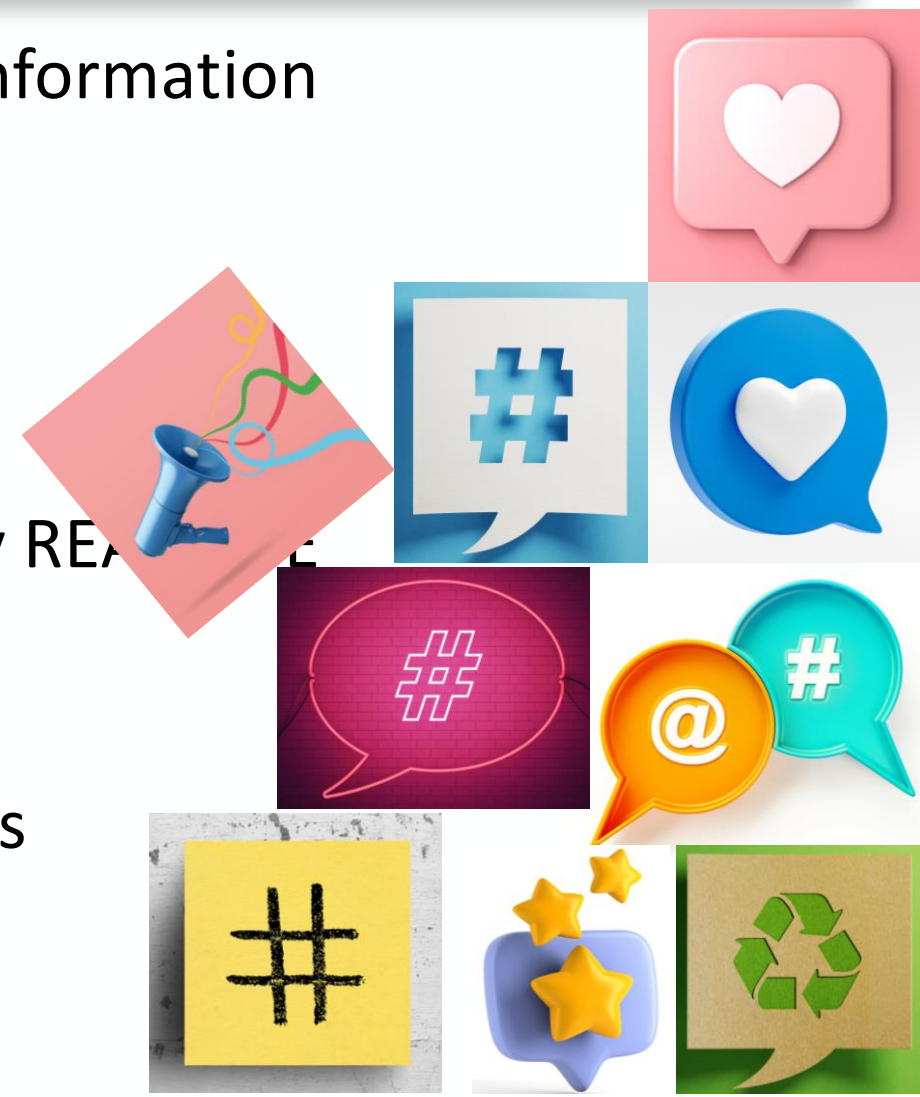
- Early successes achieved with the HPV vaccination program attributable to
 - ✓ Strong political will
 - ✓ Involvement of political champions
 - ✓ Intensive social mobilization campaigns
 - ✓ Strong and inclusive community partnerships
 - ✓ Dedicated training of health workforce

How it's going...

- Major challenges as the program has matured leading to declining willingness to accept HPV vaccine
 - ⊗ Weakening social mobilization overtime
 - ⊗ Under-prioritization of end-users / key stakeholders
 - ⊗ Inconsistent messaging and communication
 - ⊗ High turnover of trained staff
 - ⊗ Poor management of mis- and dis-information

Social mobilization in the age of growing misinformation

- Increasingly challenging to communicate reliable information
 - Growing infodemic
 - Competing and conflicting information
 - Fake news more accessible, frequently consumed
 - Growing public mistrust
- Unfortunately, existing strategies have been largely REACTIVE rather than PROACTIVE
 - Delayed communication is ineffective
- Calls for intensive planning and consolidated efforts
 - Draw on lessons learned from COVID-19 experience
- **Role of social media; an enemy OR an agent?**



How do we better engage our communities?

- **Listen!**
- **Demystify HPV vaccination!**
 - Role modeling – put a face to HPV vaccination and cervical cancer prevention
 - Conversations about HPV vaccination should be **woven into the fabric of society**
 - ☑ Leverage existing platforms — verbal communication and health worker recommendations
 - ☑ Strengthen media role and accountability — **TV soap operas**; Radio messaging and storytelling; Print media; Infographics, brochures & posters; **Social media posts, podcasts & spaces**



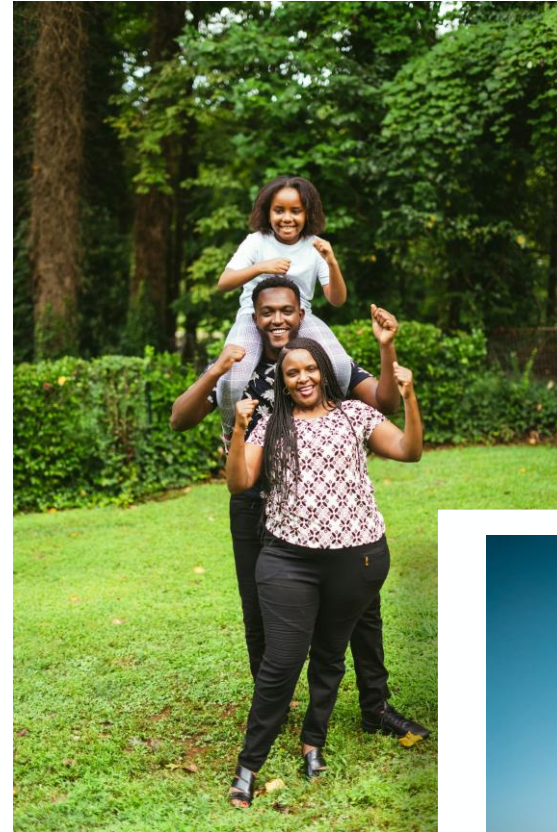
Invest in sustainable, and routine social mobilization strategies

- Need for further political buy-in
 - Sustainable financing for social mobilization efforts
- Develop a national social mobilization plan
 - With built-in mis-information prevention and management frameworks
- Encourage ownership among delivery agents
 - Engage vaccinators and other cadres, prioritize their needs, and provide continuous training



Invest in people-centred, adolescent-led HPV vaccination programs

- Strengthen community partnerships
 - Get to know your community!
 - Value stakeholders' opinions and address concerns timeously
 - Intentionally magnify adolescent voices
- **One size DOES NOT fit all**
 - Tailor communication strategies to various stakeholders
- **Context matters!**
 - Timely, transparent, culturally appropriate, context-specific information on risks and benefits of the HPV vaccine



So, what does this mean for Josiah and Annabel?



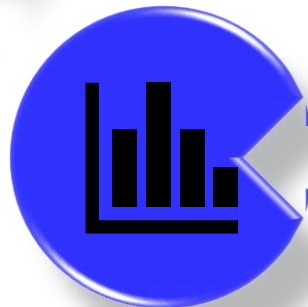
Strong investments in routinized social mobilization strategies



Capable healthcare providers



Accessible, culturally appropriate, context-specific communication



Effective monitoring and tailored improvements; guided by quality data



The price we pay for
misinformation, or
disinformation, or **withholding**
information, is the life and
wellbeing of **innocent children**
