



# POLIO STOP

Quarterly Newsletter of the Nigeria National PolioPlus Committee

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Change

SEPTEMBER 2025



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## CHAIRMAN'S REMARK

# World Polio Day 2025: A Call to Every Rotarian's Heart

Every October 24, the Rotary family around the world pauses to reflect on one of the most defining missions of our time, the fight to end polio. World Polio Day is not just another date on the Rotary calendar; it is a day of remembrance, of celebration, and most importantly, of renewed commitment to finish what we started.

For more than three decades, Rotary has been at the forefront of one of the greatest public health initiatives in history. In 1985, when Rotary launched the PolioPlus program, more than 350,000 children in 125 countries were paralyzed by polio every year. It seemed like an impossible battle. But Rotary saw a future where no child would ever suffer from this crippling disease again. That vision sparked a movement, one that has brought us to where we are today, with polio cases reduced by 99.9% worldwide.

Thanks to the dedication of Rotarians, volunteers, and partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, entire regions of the world, including the African continent, have been certified polio-free. This is history in motion. It is proof that when people unite around a common purpose, the world can change.

Yet, our fight is not over. As long as polio exists anywhere, it remains a threat everywhere. Just one child paralyzed means that thousands more are at risk. The world is watching Rotary to lead with courage, creativity, and compassion, and World Polio Day is our platform to show that leadership.

World Polio Day is more than a commemoration; it is Rotary's story brought to life. It is our chance to tell the world what we stand for, service above self, the protection of children, and the pursuit of a healthier, safer future for all.

It is also a time for advocacy and awareness. Communities look to Rotary for leadership, and through our events, whether large or small, we educate, inspire, and mobilize. World Polio Day connects Rotarians in villages, towns, and cities to a global campaign that has already changed the course of history.

And finally, it is about fundraising and action. Ending polio requires resources, and every contribution

counts. Whether it's a naira dropped in a collection box, a fundraiser concert, or a corporate partnership, each effort adds up to vaccines for children who may otherwise go unprotected.

This year, every Rotary Club in Nigeria should step into the moment. Plan your World Polio Day event. Register it. Make it count.

Your event does not need to be grand to make an impact. It could be as simple as:

- Organizing a polio awareness walk in your community
- Hosting a school debate or essay competition for young people
- Mounting a billboard or painting murals to spread the message
- Running a social media campaign where every member records a one-minute polio fact video
- Creating fundraising activities like auctions, charity rides, or concerts
- Holding a seminar or medical outreach to highlight disease prevention.

No matter the size, every event adds to Rotary's collective story of determination. And when you register your event on the Rotary platform, you connect your club to a global map of impact, a network of Rotarians united by one goal: ending polio.

The truth is this: Rotary started this fight. Rotary must finish it. Governments, health agencies, and partners are looking to us for leadership. But even more importantly, children are counting on us.

When your club celebrates World Polio Day, you are not just hosting an event. You are telling a mother in Afghanistan that her baby's future matters. You are showing a child in Pakistan that they deserve a life free from paralysis. You are proving to the world that service above self is not just a motto, it is a way of life.

World Polio Day is Rotary's legacy. Generations to come will remember whether we finished what we started. This is our chance to write history not in words, but in action.

So, as we count down to October 24, 2025, I ask you: What will your club do? How will you mark this day? What story will you tell the world about Rotary's mission to end polio forever?

The moment is here. The responsibility is ours. Let's rise together, Rotarians. Let's register our events, bring our creativity to life, and show the world that we will not stop until every child is safe.

Together, we can end polio. Together, we will make history.



## Together we end Polio

The world will soon see the end of Polio. Make no mistake about it. The forces against polio are simply too many and too determined for there to be any other outcome.

Since the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1988 when Rotary led a partnership to agree with the governments of the world that poliomyelitis would be the second human disease to be eradicated, there has been room for no other outcome. In spite of the setbacks and challenges which have been placed in our way, humanity continues to march forward with one focus-making sure that this is the last generation which has to grapple with the effects and consequences of paralytic polio.

We have come over 99 percent of the way, we have eradicated two of 3 wild polio strains, we have reduced the number of endemic countries from 125 in 1988 to just 2 in 2025. We have reduced polio incidence from 350,000 new cases every year to less than 30 so far in 2025, from summers of dread to a situation where one single case of polio now constitutes an outbreak. And we have done it TOGETHER.

As we approach this year's World Polio Day, it's the theme of togetherness that is on my mind. It is one thing you cannot get away from if you're to discuss polio eradication. From the earliest moments in our eradication story, it has been of one party reaching out to another in the full realization that eradicating polio cannot and will not be accomplished individually. From conversations between individuals at Rotary International, the US National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO), the largest public-private health initiative became coalesced with the formation of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in 1988. This initiative, led by Rotary, WHO, UNICEF, USCDC, Gates Foundation, Gavi the vaccine

alliance and other partners continues to strive and to make progress against the virus wherever it may hide in any part of our globe. We should therefore strive to take advantage of the synergistic relationships between these partners to achieve the objectives we have set before us this World Polio Day.

On a personal note, I will cease to be the National Program Coordinator and Editor of this newsletter at the end of September 2025. It has been an honour and a great privilege to serve as part of PolioPlus Nigeria since I joined this organization in December 2014. It has been a decade and some months of a beautiful relationship with the executive committee of the Nigeria National PolioPlus Committee (NNPPC) as well as the Administrative and Technical Staff of this great organization. I have grown a lot and learned a lot, particularly in the last year when I have served as the National Program Coordinator and technical lead of this organization. While I will remain part of the Polio fight with another agency, I sadly will no longer be a part of the Rotary family. Still, on the theme of togetherness and cooperation, I will continue to avail my time, talent and resources to the cause of Rotary International and Polio Eradication wherever I am. I know I will be celebrating the World Polio Day 2025 strongly and contributing generously to all the efforts to celebrate it wherever I am.

I want to thank you, our beloved readers, most sincerely for your support through the years and for your encouragement of the cause of polio eradication. Hopefully, this relationship will not end and I can continue to send in my guest contributions from time to time. Remember that Polio anywhere in this world remains a threat to every unvaccinated child and we are not done till we remove the threat of polio from everywhere in the world. I am confident that we will achieve it and I am confident that we will achieve it soon. Let's end polio TOGETHER



## Engagement of Field Volunteers in Campaign Supervision, A plus to PolioPlus



Rotary International has a unique selling point in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative of being able to provide volunteers to supportively supervise and monitor immunization campaigns. With over 1.4 million members across every nation of the world, Rotary possesses a very potent army that could and should be easily summoned to support polio eradication activities anywhere in the world.

In recent times however, Nigerian Rotarians have not responded to appeals to come out in their numbers to support immunization campaigns. Typically, less than a hundred entries are made on the ODK supervision platform by Rotarians. This is not helped by the fact that even when Rotarians come out for supervision, they fail to use the ODK platform to register such supervision, in spite of the repeated trainings by the Nigeria National PolioPlus Committee (NNPPC).

In recent times, however, there has been noticeable improvement in the numbers of Rotary supervisors seen in the field during vaccination campaigns and also in the number of ODK entries submitted by persons representing Rotary. This trend started in September 2024. Traditionally the Field Coordinator in Borno State may submit, say 20 to 25 ODK entries over the course of a campaign. However, in September 2024, there were 112 additional ODK entries made by supervisors from Rotary. This represented an additional 112 teams supervised by someone from Rotary. This was due to the engagement of Field Supervisors by Rotary for that round. In October 2024, 9 Field Volunteers engaged by Rotary submitted 168 ODK entries. And in April 2025, the number of teams supervised by someone from Rotary International rose to 180.

It is clear that the engagement of these volunteers has helped to improve supervision and also increase the impact and visibility of Rotary International in the field during campaign rounds. Another importance of this engagement is that some of the volunteers so engaged are students of the local university in Maiduguri and some have become motivated to join the Rotaract club in the University even while Rotarians are finding it difficult to be in the field due to work and business schedules.

While there remains a need to continue to emphasize the importance of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and Rotary's founding role in it so that they can take full ownership, there is no denying that engaging field volunteers for the program is a plus for Rotary's PolioPlus and the leadership of the Nigeria National PolioPlus Committee led by PDG Joshua Hassan. Expanding and improving on this engagement should be encouraged in order to help Nigeria achieve her objective of kicking polio out completely from anywhere within her shores.

By Almai Some  
Field Coordinator, Borno Field Office.





## Gates urges Nigeria to sustain its commitment to polio eradication amid tightening funds

Bill Gates, Chair of the Gates Foundation, has advised the Federal Government to maintain its longstanding commitment to ending polio transmission in the country.

He stressed that with the tightening of global funding, it's more important than ever that Nigeria keeps up the momentum of polio eradication.

Now is not the time to stop because unfortunately, the virus is still circulating, and we need stronger action especially in Sokoto, Kano, Katsina, and Kebbi states," Gates said.

He emphasized the urgent need for the government to continue its longstanding commitment alongside partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and the heroic efforts of frontline health workers to end polio transmission.

Gates noted that the emergence of variant polio cases remains a serious challenge and can fuel doubts about vaccine safety.

"That's why we are supporting Nigerian-led and GPEI partners like UNICEF and WHO to engage affected communities directly, building trust through transparent communication, listening to concerns, and working with local leaders to dispel misinformation.

"That's what we need to do more, and the key to stopping outbreaks lies in rapid, high-quality response campaigns and closing immunity gaps," he added.

He highlighted the importance of robust routine immunization coverage to achieve and sustain a polio-free world, increasing population immunity and reducing the immediate and long-term risk of polio.

According to him, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is a key partner in this effort, financing the provision of the inactivated polio vaccine in lower-income countries.

"The world is in the final sprint to end this horrific disease, and Nigeria is key to that success.

"With strong investments and partnerships, I am confident we will bring about a world where no child faces the threat of polio," he said.

Gates acknowledged the Nigerian government's efforts and progress, disclosing that polio detections in Nigeria reduced by about 40% in Q1 2025 compared to the same time last year.

"We have also seen some useful improvements in the April immunization campaign. These are positive outcomes from all the hard work the government and partners have been doing," he said.

The philanthropist noted that Africa's success in eradicating wild poliovirus is a major public health achievement made possible by strong government leadership, sustained surveillance, and effective partnerships.

"But we must understand that ongoing disease surveillance will play a vital role in detecting and rapidly responding to new outbreaks," he said.

Polio (poliomyelitis) is an infectious disease caused by a virus that invades the nervous system and can lead to irreversible paralysis.

While polio can affect individuals of any age, it primarily targets children under the age of five.

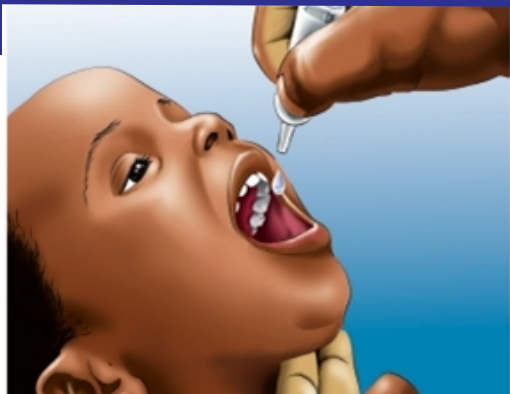
There is no cure for polio. The disease can only be prevented through effective and consistent vaccination.

Nigeria was declared free of wild poliovirus in 2020, marking a major public health milestone.

Despite this achievement, Nigeria has experienced a resurgence of polio, reporting 122 confirmed cases of circulating poliovirus type 2 (cVPV2) between January 2024 and March 10, 2025.

These recent cases have occurred mainly in the northern states, where transmission has persisted.

The persistence of cVPV2 highlights the ongoing challenge of polio eradication in Nigeria. The government is now considering new measures to combat the outbreak and close immunity gaps.



## Nigeria Intensifies Fight Against Polio Before 2025 Deadline

As Nigeria grapples with the ongoing transmission of poliovirus, a media dialogue has brought renewed attention to the urgent need for sustained engagement, accurate public information, and collective action to meet the goal of eradicating polio by the end of 2025.

The Media Dialogue on Polio Eradication, held at Mogadishu Metro Hotel in Kaduna, convened a large gathering of journalists, on-air personalities (OAPs), and social media influencers to strengthen the role of the media in mobilising communities for polio vaccination.

Participants discussed the impact of media coverage on public attitudes towards vaccination and explored how OAPs and digital influencers can serve as effective messengers in promoting immunisation through their platforms.

The forum highlighted past successes in vaccination campaigns, the positive impact on affected children and communities, and encouraged media practitioners to take an active role in disseminating accurate information, mobilising caregivers using tools such as the Hausa version of the “No More Zero Dose” song, public service announcements (PSAs), and simplified one-liners and holding stakeholders accountable, including government actors and development partners.

Speaking at the event, Dr Idris Baba, UNICEF Field Officer in Kaduna, underscored the persistent transmission of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) despite intensified efforts in 2024.

“Although detections dropped from 166 in 2023 to 122 in 2024, the number of children paralysed by cVDPV2 has risen—from 46 to 98 in the past three years,” he said, pointing to gaps in outbreak control.

Detection of the virus continues in the country with 12 states and many LGAs being affected including Lagos and Oyo State in the southern part of the country.

A polio virus type 3 detection in Yobe also raises alarm over low type 3 immunity levels.

Dr Baba noted that over 400 media mentions were generated through media dialogues and appearances across northern Nigeria during World Immunisation Week and the April 2025 National Immunisation Plus Days (NIPDs).

“Sustaining the massive media engagement from

April throughout the year is critical,” he said. “We must outnumber misinformation by amplifying stories of success and resilience.”

He stressed that collective action is essential to meeting the goal of interrupting all forms of transmission of the virus in Nigeria by the end of 2025 saying, “We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. We have all the right tools. The oral polio vaccine has reduced paralysis due to polioviruses globally by 99.9%.”

From 1988 to 2021, the oral polio vaccine is estimated to have prevented 24 million cases of childhood paralysis globally. However, due to the highly contagious nature of poliovirus, even a single case poses a global threat.

To eliminate the virus, 95% of all children under five must receive the oral polio vaccine in every round.

Yet, in many parts of Nigeria, a critical number of children are still missed during each campaign.

“Low immunisation coverage, poor sanitation, and high malnutrition are the key drivers of continued polio transmission,” said Dr Baba.

He commended LGA Chairmen who supported previous campaign rounds, some using their own funds, and urged timely release of counterpart funding for the upcoming campaigns.

UNICEF also called on LGA Chairmen and their spouses to flag off polio campaigns in every local government area, to galvanise local participation.

“Caregivers must allow children under five to be vaccinated during every round—even if they’ve received polio vaccines previously,” said Baba.

“Until transmission stops, no child is fully protected.”

Drawing attention to the global stigma Nigeria faces, he noted, “Many Nigerians returning from Hajj are made to queue for oral polio vaccines because our country is still battling the virus, while 99.9% of the world has eradicated it.

“This embarrassment must end. Our children deserve to live free of this fear and other vaccine-preventable diseases.”

The media dialogue closed with a strong call to action for media professionals, government leaders, development partners, and communities to act in unison to stop polio transmission once and for all.

# Polio eradication efforts in Kaduna state the journey so far.

Kaduna state has been actively working towards polio eradication through various efforts and strategies such as;

Engagement of Traditional leaders, Religious leaders, School operators, Security agencies, influential men and women, organising town hall meetings and involvement of Rotary field volunteers to monitor the process and give supportive supervision.

The State also deploys several efforts in the fight against Polio virus. Most notable amongst these are the state immunization plus days, the polio outbreak response, and other special interventions. State Immunization Plus Days (SIPDs) play a pivotal role in advancing polio eradication efforts in Kaduna State. These targeted campaigns offer a concentrated burst of immunization, reaching vast swathes of the population in a short timeframe. By mobilizing resources and manpower, SIPDs ensure that even the most remote and marginalized communities receive crucial polio vaccinations. In Kaduna State, where pockets of resistance and accessibility challenges persist, these initiatives serve as a potent tool to bridge gaps in immunization coverage. Through rigorous planning, community engagement, and strategic deployment of healthcare workers, SIPDs bolster immunity levels across the state, creating a protective shield against the poliovirus. Moreover, they serve as a platform for health education, empowering communities with knowledge about the importance of vaccination and dispelling misconceptions. In synergy with routine immunization efforts, SIPDs stand as a beacon of hope in the fight against polio, inching Kaduna State closer to the long-awaited goal of eradication. Polio outbreak responses are instrumental in fortifying polio eradication endeavours in Kaduna State. When an outbreak occurs, swift and targeted action is imperative to contain the spread of the virus and prevent further transmission. These responses involve heightened surveillance, intensified vaccination campaigns, and meticulous monitoring of high-risk areas. By promptly identifying and vaccinating susceptible populations, outbreak responses create a protective barrier, curbing the virus's ability to gain

a foothold. In Kaduna State, where sporadic outbreaks pose persistent challenges, these rapid and coordinated efforts are crucial in interrupting transmission chains and safeguarding communities. Furthermore, outbreak responses serve as an opportunity to strengthen healthcare infrastructure, enhance surveillance systems, and bolster community engagement. Through a multi-pronged approach encompassing vaccination drives, surveillance enhancements, and community empowerment, polio outbreak responses contribute significantly to the overarching goal of polio eradication in Kaduna State.

Special interventions e.g., RES [Reaching every child], IBRA,[In between round activities] etc, tailored to the unique challenges of Kaduna State play a pivotal role in advancing polio eradication efforts. These interventions are designed to address specific barriers to immunization, such as geographical isolation, socio-economic disparities, insecurity, and zero dose children. By leveraging innovative strategies, such as mobile vaccination teams, community dialogues with traditional and community leaders, and targeted communication campaigns, special interventions ensure that vulnerable populations receive essential polio vaccinations. In Kaduna State, where pockets of insecurity, resistance and accessibility issues persist, these targeted approaches are crucial in reaching every child with life-saving immunizations. Moreover, special interventions foster collaboration between government agencies, healthcare providers, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations, fostering a cohesive response to the eradication efforts. Through tailored solutions and collaborative efforts, special interventions play a vital role in accelerating progress towards a polio-free Kaduna State

Our challenge now is the insecure settlement where teams cannot reach and virus are springing up from there such as Kauru LGA in Dawaki ward where we had 2 positive cases of polio circulating virus in same ward and settlements.



DG Lanre Adedoyin Promoting SO THEY CAN WALK during D9112 PolioPlus seminar



District 9111 PolioPlus Participant



Rotarian Omotayo Oluwale Abiodun (R) of the Rotary Club of Oto-Ijanikin, donated \$120 to PolioPlus during the District 9111 PolioPlus Seminar



NNPPC Team and representatives of Partner Agencies during the Kano D9127 polio seminar



Cross Section of District 9127 PolioPlus Seminar in Abuja



DG Dame Joy Okoro addressing participants during D9127 PolioPlus seminar in Jos.



NPC Gbenga teaching participants how to use ODK during D9112 PolioPlus Seminar.



DG Henry Akinyele (D9111) vaccinating a child during his visit to Rotary Club of Maryland, Ikeja,



Creative Fundraising for Polio Kicks Off in District 9111



Advocacy visit to His Excellency, Sir Monday Onyeme, FCA, the Deputy Governor of Delta State, led by PDG Andy Uwejeayan (right) and DG Anthony Woghiren, D9141



## Rotary Inspires me to help end Polio

I have been a part of the Polio Eradication Efforts in Nigeria for many years especially in the north-west of Nigeria. I have been part of many campaigns and witnessed many strategies being used to boost vaccine uptake and address issues of vaccine rejection and noncompliance. One thing that has struck me is the extra quality and innovation that Rotary International and Rotarian volunteers have brought to the program. I have however always been on the outside looking in and hoping that one day perhaps, I would also be able to understand that special and unique quality that Rotary brings to the polio program in Nigeria. One occasion that clearly comes to mind was in 2004. I was at that time in Kano State as a Central Facilitator supporting Dala LGA, which was at that time, an LGA with many confirmed cases of wild polio viruses as well as many instances of vaccine rejection and noncompliance. Many strategies had been deployed to improve the uptake of the oral polio vaccine (OPV) in the LGA. Sensitization meetings had been conducted, town announcements had been made, community dialogues had been conducted with many engagements aimed at boosting interpersonal communication and relationship between vaccination teams and the communities but the problems persisted. That was until a gentleman from Rotary showed up.

On the second day of implementation during the February 2004 round of National Immunization Days (NIDs), a tall but humble man showed up at the Dala LGA Cold Store while teams were taking off for the day's activities at around 7.30 in the morning. He introduced himself as a Rotarian who had come to support the social mobilization efforts of the LGA during the round. I took him to the NPI Manager which was the appellation given to the LGA Immunization Officer (LIO) at the time where he again introduced himself and explained that he wanted to support the team in social

mobilization and noncompliance resolution. It has been such a long time that his name eludes me now but when I think about it, it does not really matter as he could have been any one of the thousands of Rotary members in Nigeria and millions across the world, who routinely show up and invest their time, talent and resources in doing good and in trying to ensure that no child is paralyzed by polio every again.

During our conversation, this Rotarian enquired as to what strategies we had already used and we listed the sundry strategies that had been deployed in engaging the communities, especially the heads of noncompliant households. He asked if we had considered street vaccinations and using whistles to directly call the attention of children playing in the streets for vaccination. We had not even thought of it and had never done so.

He suggested that we trialed the strategy and personally procured for our vaccination teams two thousand whistles. The idea being that any child who was given the oral polio vaccine drops would also receive a brand-new shiny whistle as well. These whistles were initially shared among vaccination teams in Gobirawa ward which was a ward that had produced wild polio viruses and had a high number of noncompliant households in 2004.

We thereafter embarked on street immunization with the town announcers blowing whistles. Within a short period, eligible children including those from noncompliant households started trooping out and receiving the oral polio vaccine from our immunization teams. All the teams immunized many previously unimmunized children on that day.

During the review meeting that evening, the Independent monitoring report revealed that many houses marked RX- indicating noncompliance were found with children finger-marked and vaccinated. Upon questioning, some of the parents confirmed that the children had indeed been vaccinated on the street.

When the news got to the District Head of Dala, he directed that all ward heads should support the street vaccination approach. In that February 2004 NIDs noncompliance reduced by sixty percent in Gobirawa wards A, B and C thus improving immunization coverage in Dala LGA. When I think about it now, I realize that this might have actually been one of the first instances of the successful deployment of the directly observed polio vaccination (DOPV) strategy in Nigeria and it was introduced to us by a Rotarian!

In August 2025, I resumed in Katsina as the Rotary Field Coordinator supporting polio eradication efforts in Katsina State. I am no longer on the outside looking in. I am inspired by my initial contact with Rotary and my engagement with Rotarians since then to offer my own quota to the efforts to interrupt transmission of the variant poliomyelitis in Nigeria.

Already, I have joined the Strategy working group and Advocacy, Communications and Social Mobilization (ACSM) working group at the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC). I have also traveled to Kano to support in between round activities (IBRA) where I was part of the team to Dawakin Kudu LGA. I am very eager to also make a difference and help contribute to delivery the promise of Rotary that the next generation will be a generation that is free of the scourge of the poliovirus.



Mansur Garba Funtua  
Field Coordinator, Katsina State

## Polio Vaccines: Sokoto Govt Purchases 26 Additional Cooling Systems



The Sokoto State Government has approved the purchase of 26 additional cooling systems to ensure effective storage of polio vaccines across the state.

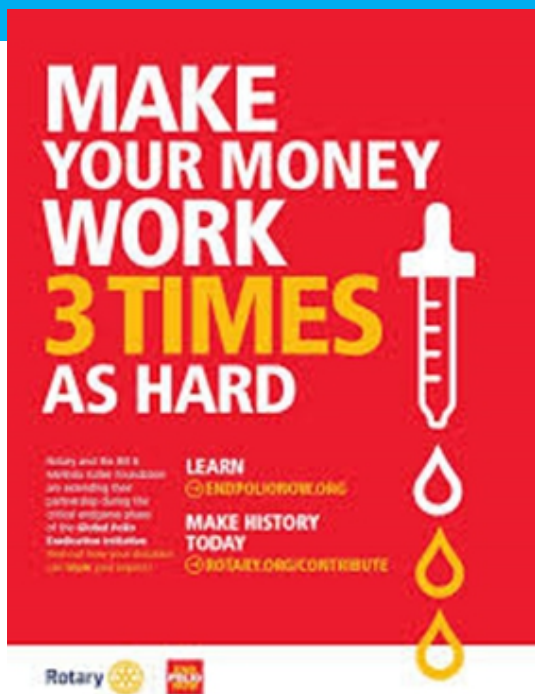
Chairman of the Task Force Committee on Polio Eradication and Improvement of Routine Immunization, and Deputy Governor, Idris Mohammed Gobir, announced this during a committee meeting at his conference hall.

He explained that each of the 23 local government areas and the three zonal offices would receive one cooling system, noting that many of the existing units were either weak or non-functional. Represented by the State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Faruk Umar Abubakar Wurno, the Deputy Governor said the move would guarantee the potency of vaccines and improve immunization performance.

Gobir expressed hope that the meeting would also address other challenges affecting polio eradication efforts in the state, such as poor data collection, political interference, and negative attitudes among some health personnel.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to implementing recommendations from the committee and expressed optimism that the next round of vaccinations, scheduled for September 11–14, would record better coverage.

Earlier, the Special Adviser to the State Primary Healthcare Development Agency, Dr. Muhammad Bello Marnona, described the meeting as an opportunity to harmonize strategies to eradicate polio from the state



## Rotary and Gates Foundation extend partnership to end polio

have to live in fear of this horrific disease ever again."

The funds are used to support everything from vaccine delivery, surveillance, and community engagement to the implementation and maintenance of polio eradication programs in affected regions, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, the only countries that continue to report cases of wild poliovirus.

The funding also allows Rotary to help aid emergency response for polio outbreaks, and in late 2024, Rotary committed US\$500,000 to support the first round of a two-round polio vaccination campaign in Gaza following confirmation of a 10-month-old child who contracted polio in the region.

Polio—a paralyzing and sometimes deadly disease—will become the second human disease in history to be eradicated, and this critical funding ensures that efforts to protect children in at-risk countries continue.

"For 40 years Rotary has remained steadfast in our commitment to ending polio for good, and the Gates Foundation partnership renewal underscores the importance of this effort," said Past Rotary International President Stephanie Urchick. "With gratitude to the Gates Foundation, we remain resolute in delivering on our promise of a polio-free world."

Rotary has committed over \$2.9 billion and countless volunteer hours to fighting polio since it launched its polio eradication program, PolioPlus, in 1985. In 1988, Rotary joined in partnership with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to form the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). The Gates Foundation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance later joined. When the initiative launched, there were 350,000 cases of polio every year, but thanks to the GPEI's efforts, in partnership with world governments the incidence of polio has plummeted by more than 99.9 percent.

Rotary and the Gates Foundation are renewing their longstanding partnership to end polio, announcing a joint commitment of up to US\$450 million to support the global polio eradication effort at the annual Rotary International Convention.

"While historic progress has been made toward defeating polio—90 percent of the world's population is free from the wild poliovirus—we're facing significant challenges from competing financial priorities to fragile health systems. Furthermore, the detection of polio in places like Papua New Guinea that were previously polio free demonstrates that polio anywhere is a threat everywhere," said Rotary International PolioPlus Committee Chair Mike McGovern. "The extension of our fundraising partnership with the Gates Foundation allows us to reach children around the world with lifesaving vaccines, keeping every child and community safe from this preventable disease."

Rotary will continue to raise \$50 million per year, with every dollar to be matched with two additional dollars from the Gates Foundation. This renewed agreement will translate into up to a total of \$450 million to support the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI).

"Rotary was the first to envision a world without polio—and today, we have the tools and knowledge to make that vision a reality," said Bill Gates, Chair of the Gates Foundation. "If we all maintain our commitment and keep funding the solutions we know work, then soon, no family will

## “Seeing is believing”: How Polio survivors are driving immunisation in northern Nigeria



Hadiza Bello, a Polio Survivor and mother helping to drive vaccine acceptance in Sokoto

On a quiet Saturday morning in June, a dozen polio survivors gathered at a Social Welfare Centre in Sokoto, North-West Nigeria. It was a meeting to map out their schedules for an advocacy drive: a house-to-house awareness campaign ahead of national efforts to eradicate polio transmission by December 2025.

The members of the group teamed up with vaccinators to help them encourage parents to protect their children from the crippling virus.

“We do this because we don't want any child to go through what we did,” says 35-year-old Bello Dikko, Chair of the Polio Survivors Association in Sokoto State. “We want to be champions of change.”

“This is what we do: advocating for polio immunisation among households. We want to [help] overcome vaccine hesitancy and increase vaccine uptake within our communities.”

It all started in 2004, he says. What began as a movement of less than a dozen polio survivors has in the past couple of decades grown into a movement of 282 registered members across Sokoto State.

Like Dikko, Mukhtar Sani, 51, is one of the founding members of the Association. Sani said he was motivated by seeing high rates of vaccine rejection in Sokoto South, one of Nigeria's highest-risk Local Government Areas (LGAs).

“Many of us polio survivors came from those very households that once rejected the vaccine. Even among the polio survivors we have many of them who did not want their children to be immunised. That was the situation then,” he said.

Survivors now describe plying the same streets on which they once faced stigma for their disabilities, using their personal stories to shift mindsets.



Bello Dikko, Chairman Polio Survivors' Group, Sokoto, Nigeria

Dikko and his team now use the “seeing is believing” approach, showing their changed bodies, telling their stories, and laying bare the irreversible damage polio has inflicted on them.

“That is why we use our stories to convince families, so they do not repeat the mistakes made by our parents,” says Dikko. “People now connect with what they can see, and what they can feel. When we tell our stories, it makes parents think twice.”

For 32-year-old Nuradeen Abubakar, the association's Secretary, the scars are not just physical. “I was bullied and excluded as a child. I don't want any child to go through that,” he says.



Mukhtar Sani, a founding member of the Polio Survivors' Group in Sokoto

These survivors have built an armour of resilience to overcome the anxieties and anguish in the societies they lived in. Hauwa Buhari, Social and Behavioural Change Officer at UNICEF's Sokoto Office, said the Association's activities have come a long way in helping parents take the right decision on polio vaccination.

"Today, people have a perception of 'seen is believed'. If you don't see it, you don't get to believe it actually happened. We didn't see them as victims. We see them as champions who tell their stories to break the wall of denial," Hauwa asserts. Despite national efforts, immunisation with the full series of polio vaccines in Nigeria stands at just 62%. That's well below the threshold for herd immunity – and in some parts of the country, coverage is thinner still. Vaccine hesitancy, misinformation and cultural beliefs remain major challenges. But the survivors' efforts are making a difference.

Safiya Tambuwal, a housewife in Sokoto, remembers how a member of the association changed her husband's mind. "I always wanted to vaccinate our baby, but my husband refused because of his religious beliefs," she says.

The turning point came in May last year, when Hadiza Bello, a 32-year-old survivor and a mother herself, approached Tambuwal's husband on the need to embrace immunisation. "I always had the intention of getting my child vaccinated long before then, but my husband had remained indifferent until Hadiza intervened."

Tambuwal's husband had warned her of dire consequences if she took the child for immunisation exercises. As a stay-at-home mother, she felt dependent on his permission. "After a weeklong conversation and arguments on the contradictions and beliefs on the Islamic perspectives with Hadiza, my husband eventually sorted for my son to be vaccinated," Tambuwal recalls.

Tambuwal's husband was not the only person whose stance shifted when he met Bello. "I shared my story to most households, and it really touched them a lot," Bello says. "Being a woman, in motherhood, but with paralysed body."

Bello, who uses a hand-operated wheelchair, went on "When they see me – pregnant, disabled, still advocating – they listen. Many don't hesitate after that."

The association's impact has grown through partnerships with UNICEF and the Sokoto State Ministry of Health. Together, they've organised radio campaigns, para-soccer tournaments and public rallies on UN commemoration days. Survivors now speak at national and state health events, challenging stereotypes and reshaping public opinion.

"We've achieved a lot because of our partnerships," says Sani. "We work together with Sokoto State Primary Healthcare Development Agency through the State Ministry of Health to achieve this."

In October last year, UNICEF hosted a three-week [para-soccer tournament](#) for polio survivors. The event drew attention to their cause and gave survivors a platform to inspire others.

Community leaders and health officials agree that the survivors' involvement is key to progress. "In this community, every vaccinated child is a sign that a polio survivor made a difference," says Abdullahi Shehu, a community leader and immunisation team member in Sokoto North.

Sokoto State's Health Commissioner, Faruk Umar, says the numbers speak for themselves. "In April, over 4,000 households rejected vaccines. By June, that number now dropped to 1,500 households. That's the power of community-based advocacy." UNICEF's Hauwa adds, "People are beginning to see that polio is real. Most polio cases in Nigeria are from the north. Survivors are helping us reach those who are hardest to convince."

Despite their successes, the survivors face serious challenges. Many lack mobility aids and rely on crawling or hand-operated wheelchairs to reach households. "Some of us crawl from house to house," says Dikko. "We need wheelchairs, tricycles, even a bus to help us move."

Funding is a persistent hurdle. As donor focus shifts, the association struggles to sustain its activities. But for Dikko, Nuradeen, Hadiza and Sani, this work is more than a campaign – it's a calling.

"We're not just telling stories," says Hadiza. "We're saving lives."



PAG Ndanusa Yakubu representing Rotary International at the Northern Traditional Council meeting



The Rotary National Programme Coordinator, Gbenga Olayiwole inspecting the vaccine during IBRA



NNPPC Field Coordinator Hauwau Auwal marking the house during supportive supervision at Runjin Biyo, Kaura Ward, Wamakko LGA, Sokoto State.



Field Coordinator Shehu Dahiru vaccinating a child during IBRA2 in Zamfara



Field Coordinator Salamatu Yusuf addressing vaccination team before take off in Kano



Field Coordinator Garce Sadiku inspecting tally sheet during IBRA 2 at Ndamisi Crescent in Kakala ward



Field Coordinator Aminu Maishanu inspecting tally sheet during IBRA 2 at Gulumbe ward in Kebbi

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