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Healthy Markets for Healthy People

SUCCESS STORY

Increasing Access to and Uptake of COVID-19 Vaccination in Liberia

Community outreach and integration of health services increases vaccine uptake in private facilities



PHOTO: DKT International Liberia

Integrating COVID-19 into Routine Immunization and FP: A community dweller receives the COVID-19 vaccine at the Tubman High School. The client willingly joins the outreach team to take her shot and is among those who were immunized during FHM Engage's community outreach initiatives.

“There is rumor about the COVID vaccine making people sick but when I took this vaccine, I never got sick, so I brought three of my friends today to take their vaccine.”

— Local community member in West-Point, Liberia

While the COVID-19 virus was confirmed to have reached Liberia in March 2020 as a part of the worldwide pandemic, challenges around COVID-19 vaccinations persist. For one, access to COVID-19 vaccines remains a challenge in certain regions; uptake is low in priority or at-risk groups (including seniors, pregnant women, health workers, and people with co-morbidity); and integration of the vaccine into the routine Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) system has still not occurred. Moreover, the private health sector, which includes more than 40 percent of the country's caregivers, has had limited involvement in the efforts to increase COVID-19 vaccination uptake and integration.

To address these challenges, USAID's Frontier Health Markets (FHM) Engage is working with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and two local organizations, DKT International Liberia and the Healthcare Federation of Liberia, to increase COVID-19 vaccine access and service coverage by integrating the COVID-19 vaccine into routine immunization in private facilities. Specifically, FHM Engage collaborated with DKT using their social marketing approach of engaging community mobilizers who visited schools, slum communities, and street corners to raise awareness of the benefits of immunization and family planning (FP).

Collaborating with health facilities, county, and district health officers, FHM Engage catalyzed a 10-day outreach exercise to ensure vaccines, immunization supplies, and FP products were made available at health facilities, schools, and community sites. During this time, 118 persons were immunized with the COVID-19 vaccine, along with several others who received routine childhood vaccines. In addition, a variety of FP products were provided on request. The exercise also employed a referral system which registers eligible community members who were sensitized about the vaccine initiative during the event and also agreed to receive the services later. 714 community members were given referral cards and follow-up plans were made to ensure that these community members will receive immunization and FP services as eligibility allows.