

**malaria  
consortium**

*disease control, better health*



# Co-implementing vitamin A supplementation with seasonal malaria chemoprevention in Sokoto state, Nigeria: A feasibility study

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2020 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene



# Introduction

# Vitamin A deficiency

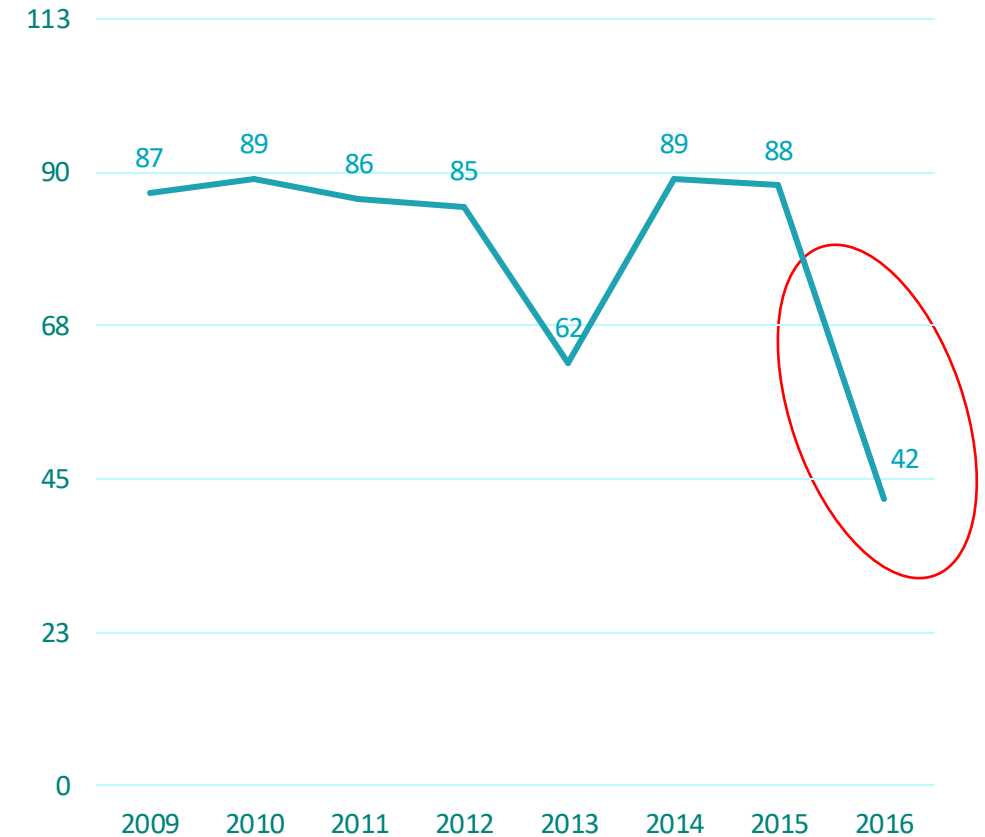
- Of the two billion people estimated to have micronutrient deficiencies globally, children in developing countries are most affected.
- Children with clinical signs of Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) are 3–12 times more likely to die than those who are not deficient.
- High-dose vitamin A supplementation (VAS) given twice yearly to children 6–59 months can reduce all-cause mortality by 24 percent.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends high-dose VAS twice yearly for countries with high under-five mortality rates.
- Despite VAD being a major risk factor for child survival in Nigeria, in 2018, vitamin A coverage was just 41 percent.
- In Nigeria, VAS is delivered to children 6–59 months twice each year via the maternal, neonatal and child health (MNCH) weeks, using a fixed post delivery strategy.

# Malaria and seasonal chemoprevention

- Nigeria has one of the highest malaria burdens, contributing about 25 percent to the global burden.
- Malaria deaths disproportionately affect children, especially those living in areas with highly seasonal malaria transmission, such as the Sahel.
- Seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC) is a WHO-recommended intermittent administration of full treatment courses of sulphadoxine-pyrimethamine and amodiaquine (SPAQ) during the malaria season to prevent malaria illness in children under five.
- SMC is delivered door-to-door by community distributors (CDs), targeting children 3–59 months.
- Nigeria introduced SMC as a pilot in 2013 and has since scaled up to all eligible states in the Sahel, reaching about 12 million eligible children in 2020.

# Case for action

- According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), children vulnerable to VAD in priority countries more than tripled (from 19 to 62 million) in 2015–2016.
- Despite MNCH weeks in Nigeria, evidence showed no significant increase in MNCH interventions, including VAS coverage.
- In 2018, VAS coverage in Nigeria (41 percent) varied widely sub-nationally, ranging from six to 86 percent.
- The number of states meeting the effective coverage threshold of 70 percent has been declining in Nigeria since 2014.

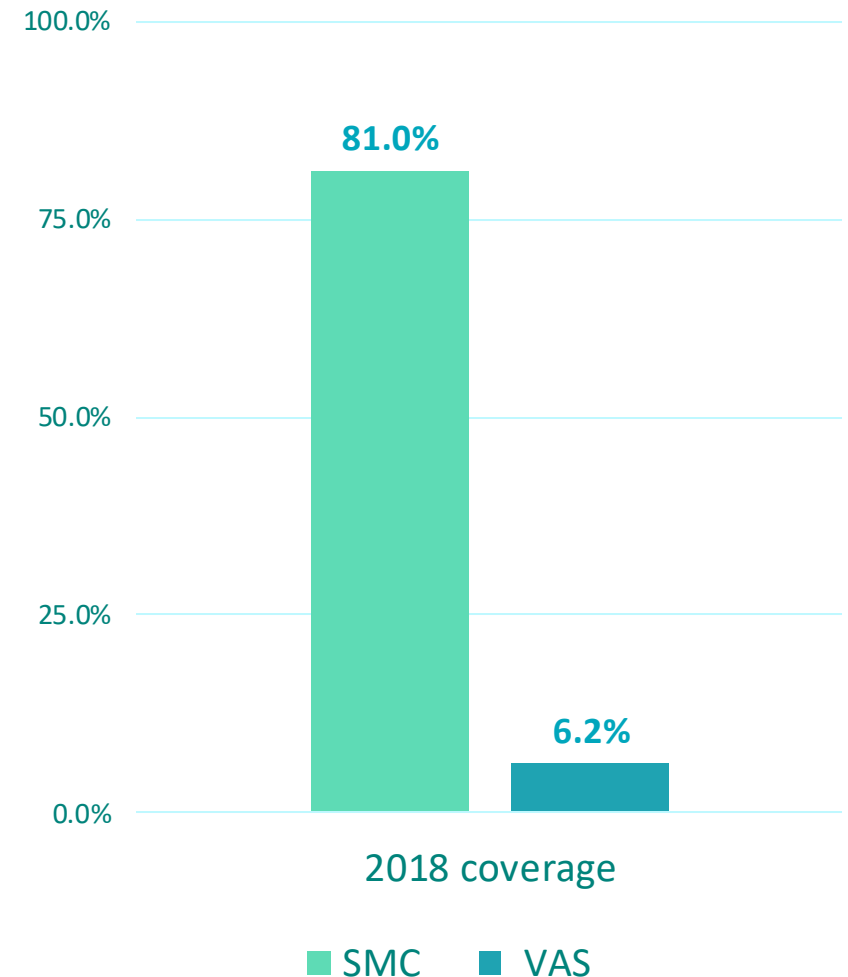


**Vitamin A coverage in priority countries with under-five mortality rates >70 percent**

Source: UNICEF global nutrition database. [Coverage at a crossroads: New directions for vitamin A supplementation programmes](#). [2018; cited 2020 Sep 29].

# Why integrate VAS with SMC?

- WHO recommends integrating VAS into public health programmes aimed at improving child survival.
- SMC presents a ready platform and an opportunity to do more with available resources.
- Both SMC and VAS target children under five.
- SMC has been successful in reaching eligible children, even in hard-to-reach areas, achieving high coverage via door-to-door visits.
- Vitamin A coverage is very low compared to SMC coverage.
- Currently, we could reach 12 million children via SMC and VAS given at least once during the year — potentially more as SMC is scaled up.



## SMC versus vitamin A coverage in Sokoto state, 2018

Sources: UNICEF. [National Nutrition and Health \(NNHS\) 2018](#). [cited 2019 Feb 28] and Malaria Consortium. [SMC survey in Northern Nigeria 2018: Final report](#). Oxford Policy Management: Nigeria; 2019.

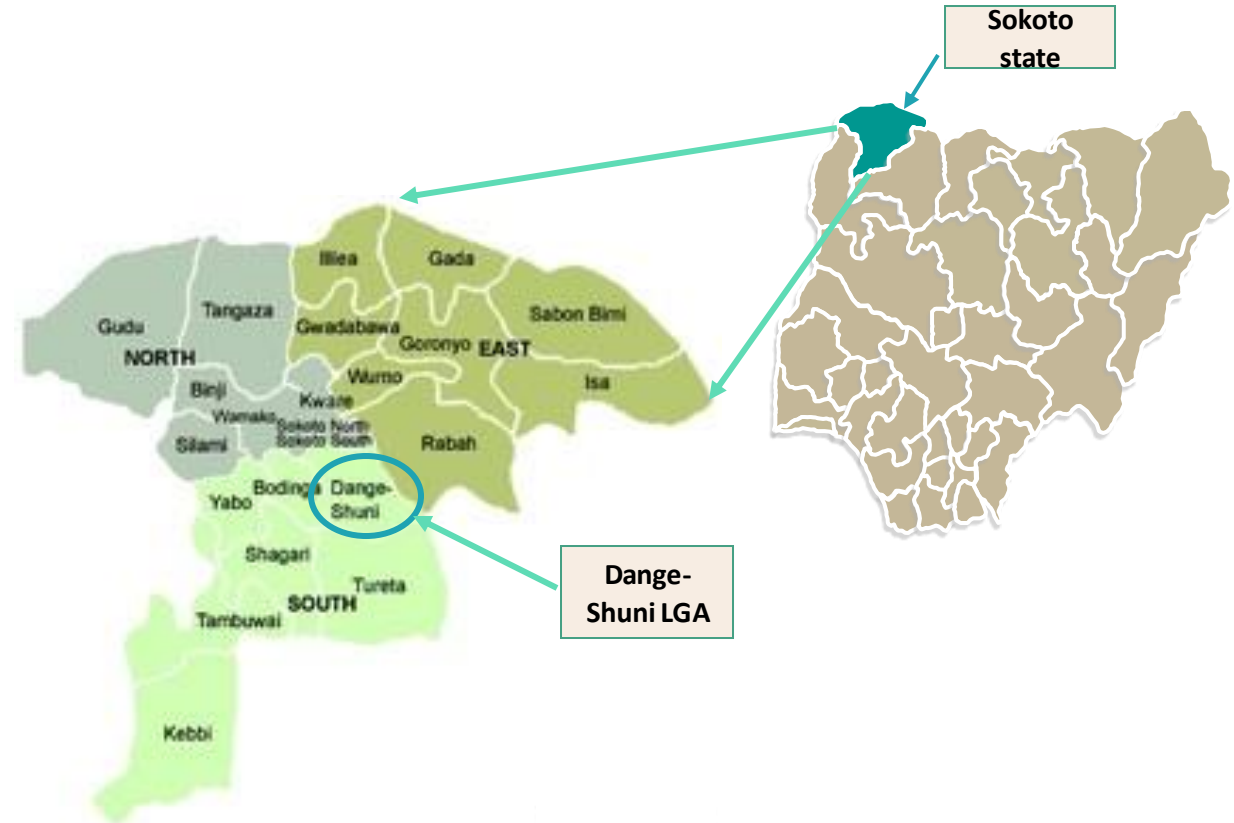


# Methodology

# Study location and context

Malaria Consortium integrated VAS during the last cycle of SMC delivery in Dange-Shuni local government area (LGA), Sokoto state, in October 2019.

Total population (2019 projection)	285,697
Target population (children under five)	57,139
SMC coverage (2018)	100 percent



Map of Sokoto state in Nigeria showing Dange-Shuni LGA

Source: Welcome to Sokoto. [Sokoto state profile](#). [2015; cited 2019 Jun 25].



# Study aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the feasibility and acceptability of integrating VAS with SMC in one LGA in Sokoto state.

## Principal research question:

- Is delivering vitamin A to children 6–59 months via SMC feasible and acceptable?

## Primary objective:

- to assess the feasibility of integrating VAS with the SMC programme.

## Secondary objectives:

- to explore the acceptability of integrating VAS with SMC from the perspective of community health workers (CHWs) and caregivers
- to estimate the potential effect of the integrated strategy on SMC coverage.

# Eligibility criteria

Eligibility for SMC	Eligibility for VAS
<b>Inclusion criterion</b>	<b>Inclusion criterion</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child is 3–59 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child is 6–59 months</li> </ul>
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>aged 5–10 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>aged 5–10 years</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allergy to SP or AQ or cotrimoxazole (septrin or bactrim)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child has severe respiratory infection or difficulty breathing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child has taken SP or cotrimoxazole (septin or bactrim) in the past four weeks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child has taken vitamin A in the past month.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child is very sick</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>child has fever.</li> </ul>	

# Study design, sampling and data analysis

- Mixed methods implementation research was conducted.
- Stakeholder engagement involved nutrition, malaria and child health programmes.
- Training: CHWs and supervisors (already trained in SMC delivery) were trained in adapted tools and standard operating procedures for co-implementation of VAS and SMC.
- Implementation: 4<sup>th</sup> SMC cycle, November 2019.
- Baseline and endline household coverage surveys (n≈180)
  - Structured questionnaire on mobile Android devices and coverage point estimates, along with 95 percent confidence intervals (CIs), calculated and compared between survey periods using cluster-adjusted chi-square tests.
- Key informant interviews (n=12) and focus group discussions (n=12)
  - Audio recordings and notes transcribed and thematic content analysed.

# Adaptation of tools for co-implementation

**SMC +VAS TALLY SHEET**  
(New Tally Sheet to be completed each day)

Tally Sheet N°: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ward: \_\_\_\_\_ Settlement: \_\_\_\_\_  
Person completing Tally Sheet: \_\_\_\_\_

SMC Cycle 4:  Day 1  Day 2

Age Group	RECEIVED SPAQ only	RECEIVED SPAQ	RECEIVED VITAMIN A
3 to <6 months SMC ONLY	RECEIVED SPAQ only	RECEIVED SPAQ	RECEIVED VITAMIN A
	SECOND DOSE SPAQ	SECOND DOSE SPAQ	VITAMIN A DAMAGED / DROPPED
	SPAQ DAMAGED / DROPPED	SPAQ DAMAGED / DROPPED	
6 to <12 months SMC and VAS	RECEIVED SPAQ	RECEIVED SPAQ	RECEIVED VITAMIN A
	SECOND DOSE SPAQ	SECOND DOSE SPAQ	VITAMIN A DAMAGED / DROPPED
	SPAQ DAMAGED / DROPPED	SPAQ DAMAGED / DROPPED	
12 to 59 months SMC and VAS	RECEIVED SPAQ	RECEIVED SPAQ	RECEIVED VITAMIN A
	SECOND DOSE SPAQ	SECOND DOSE SPAQ	VITAMIN A DAMAGED / DROPPED
	SPAQ DAMAGED / DROPPED	SPAQ DAMAGED / DROPPED	

**1 Screen for AGE eligibility:**

```

    graph TD
      A[Child is between 3-59 months] -- NO --> B[STOP]
      B --> C[Child NOT eligible for SMC or VAS]
      A -- YES --> D[Child 6-59 months]
      D --> E[Continue]
  
```

**SMC+VAS JOB AID**  
NIGERIA

**STEP 1—Greet household members and caregivers**

**STEP 2—Screen for age**  
Look at National Child Health Card and SMC Child Record Card

**Small Infant 3 to <6 months**  YES  NO

**Infant 6 to <12 months** Can hold head and neck steady when upright  YES  NO

May be able to crawl  YES  NO

**Child 12 to 59 months** Can sit without help  YES  NO

Can stand or walk  YES  NO

Not able raise arm and touch opposite ear  YES  NO

**SMC+VAS**  
(To be completed by HFA)

**PART 1—PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT:**  
Instructions: To be completed by HF Supervisor  
Items highlighted in yellow

Supervision date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor name: \_\_\_\_\_  
LGA: \_\_\_\_\_ Ward: \_\_\_\_\_  
Distributor names: \_\_\_\_\_

**PERFORMANCE STANDARD**

- Prepared and has all required materials for SMC+VAS:**
  - Sufficient blisters of SPAQ for both age groups
  - Sufficient capsules of vitamin A for both age groups
  - SMC+VAS Job Aid
  - SMC+VAS Tally Sheet
  - SMC Record Cards to meet day's target
  - National Child Health Cards and stickers to be used
  - SMC Referral Forms
  - Cups, spoons, clean water, and pen
  - Scissors, plastic bag and hand hygiene materials
  - Chalk for marking houses
  - Map for daily activity
- Wearing SMC campaign uniform**
- Gives caregiver information about benefits and precautions of SMC+VAS**
- Determines child's age:**
  - Excludes children younger than 3 months for SMC
  - Excludes children younger than 6 months for VAS
  - Excludes children older than 59 months for VAS
- Asks caregiver questions to determine if child is eligible for SMC and/or VAS:**

• Allergies to sulfa drugs or cotrimoxazole (Bactrim)?	Y	N	Y	N
• Has a one or more danger signs or unable to walk?	Y	N	Y	N
• Currently sick?	Y	N	Y	N
• Currently have fever?	Y	N	Y	N
• Allergies to SP or AQ?	Y	N	Y	N
• Currently being treated for malaria?	Y	N	Y	N
• Taken SP or AQ in past month (4 weeks)?	Y	N	Y	N
• Currently taking cotrimoxazole or Septrin or Bactrim?	Y	N	Y	N
• Side effects to SPAQ during 2nd 3rd and 4th cycles?	Y	N	Y	N
• Taken vitamin A in the past month (4 weeks)?	Y	N	Y	N

**FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH**  
National Malaria Elimination Programme (NMEP)

## Seasonal Malaria Chemoprevention & Vitamin A Supplementation




### TRAINING FLIP BOOK for Community SMC Distributors

4th Cycle 2019



## Results

# Coverage at baseline and endline

- VAS coverage increased significantly between baseline and endline, rising from two to 59 percent.
- SMC coverage increased slightly from 70 to 76 percent; however, these estimates were not statistically significant.

Variable	Baseline (n=188)		Endline (n=197)		p value
	percent	CI	percent	CI	
<b>Child received vitamin A</b>					
Yes	1.6	0.4–7.0	59.4	47.0–70.7	<0.001
No	98.4	93.0–99.7	40.6	29.3–53.0	
<b>Child received SMC</b>					
Yes	69.7	57.4–79.7	75.6	64.8–84.0	0.412
No	30.3	20.3–42.6	24.4	16.0–35.2	

# Effect of integration on quality of SMC delivery

Variable	Percent at baseline (n=131)	Percent at endline (n=149)	p value
Child received first dose from CD on first day (DOT)	67.5	53.7	0.264

- Administration of the first dose of SMC by the CDs through directly observed therapy (DOT) was not significantly different between baseline and endline.

# Perception of feasibility

- Caregivers liked the ease and convenience of door-to-door drug distribution and expressed an interest in seeing the programme extended more widely.
- Key informants:
  - believed low technical knowledge needed to administer VAS facilitated integration with SMC
  - noted potential confusion that could arise from administering dosing regimens of VAS and SMC to different age groups
  - mentioned logistical difficulties in deploying materials and drugs to hard-to-reach areas to avoid stock-outs
  - felt integration was time-consuming and some CDs were unable to reach the targeted number of children due to excessive workload.
- CDs wanted remuneration to be commensurate with their increased workload.



# Perception of acceptability and sustainability

- Most CDs and supervisors reported that “every house accepted us” and “everybody was willing” for their children to receive SMC and VAS.
- Key informants were in favour of scaling up the integrated programme.
- Supervisors wanted state government to take ownership of the integrated programme in terms of contribution, funding and accountability.
- Community members should be encouraged to take ownership of the programme by participating in planning.

# Summary of key findings

- Co-implementation of VAS and SMC is feasible and generally acceptable.
- VAS coverage increased by integrating its delivery with SMC.
- The integration of VAS did not negatively affect SMC coverage or quality.
- CDs could potentially be confused over the different SMC and VAS dosage regimen for different age groups.
- Co-implementation could be time-consuming and result in extra work for CDs.

# Key messages and implications of findings

- The SMC campaign could be used as a complementary platform to MNCH weeks for delivering at least one dose of VAS to eligible children annually, with higher coverage.
- However, scaling up will require:
  - validation of the study's findings at a larger scale
  - testing in varied contexts to tackle potential barriers at a larger scale
  - evaluation of cost-effectiveness to inform scale-up
  - addressing future barriers to implementation identified in the study
  - developing and testing alternative delivery approaches for SMC and VAS to reduce CDs' workload (e.g. extending delivery periods or increasing number of CD teams)
  - proper training and supervision to manage confusion over eligibility for different dosages of VAS and SMC.

This study was implemented by Malaria Consortium in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria, National Malaria Elimination Programme, Sokoto State Malaria Elimination Agency and National Primary Health Care Development Agency. It was made possible through philanthropic funding from GiveWell and vitamin A donations from Vitamin Angels.

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