



## Zero-dose project

### Improving immunisation among children through seasonal malaria chemoprevention campaigns

#### Background

Since 2019, the number of children who have not received a first dose of the DTP vaccine (which protects against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) has increased by five million annually.<sup>[1]</sup> These 'zero-dose' children account for nearly half of all vaccine-preventable deaths.<sup>[2]</sup> Around a quarter of zero-dose children are in West and Central Africa, where we see the greatest inequities in vaccination coverage by socioeconomic status and by urban versus rural location.<sup>[3]</sup> Despite the huge efforts being made towards improving vaccination coverage, many children remain zero-dose or under-immunised (missing the third dose of DTP).

Identifying zero-dose and under-immunised children is essential for improved health and disease prevention. This is a key priority in the 2030 Immunisation Agenda, which aims to reduce the prevalence of zero-dose children at national, regional and global levels by 50 percent.<sup>[4-6]</sup>

Following the World Health Organization's 2012 recommendations, eligible countries in West and Central Africa have been implementing seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC) as a public health strategy against malaria. Over the past decade, Malaria Consortium has been a partner of national malaria programmes

#### Country

Togo

#### Donor

Malaria Consortium US

#### Length of project

April 2024 – March 2026

#### Partners

National Malaria Programme Togo, Immunisation Division, Community Health and Elders' Division

in delivering SMC, targeting over 25 million eligible children across eight African countries in 2024. Due to their door-to-door delivery model, SMC programmes achieve high levels of coverage within target populations and provide a valuable platform for integrating and improving coverage of underutilised interventions such as routine immunisation.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Project outline and objectives

To support improved immunisation coverage, Malaria Consortium is piloting a novel two-year project to integrate child immunisation into the existing SMC programme in the Central, Kara, Savanes and Plateaux regions of Togo. In close collaboration with the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) and the Essential Programme on Immunisation (EPI), we will use SMC campaigns to identify zero-dose children and catch up missed DTP immunisations of under-immunised children.

The project's objectives and key activities include:

- integrating vaccination data collection and communication into the existing SMC delivery system to support the identification of zero-dose and under-immunised children
- implementing data-driven and tailored catch-up vaccination strategies through EPI to improve immunisation coverage
- conducting a mixed-methods evaluation of the programme's implementation and impact to document learning that will inform continual programme improvement and shared findings.

## Activities

Malaria Consortium, the NMCP and EPI will iteratively design and deliver the integrated programme. Supporting activities include training SMC community distributors and health facility

staff to deliver the programme; creating demand during the monthly SMC campaigns using dissemination of key vaccination messaging; developing a community health digital tool to support with identifying and mapping zero-dose and under-immunised children; and developing a framework to monitor outcomes and evaluate impact.

Data generated through mapping will be used to identify hotspots of suboptimal immunisation coverage, informing the design and implementation of catch-up programmes.

## Outcomes and impact

The implementation and evaluation of this integrated programme will give us a deeper understanding of the prevalence and determinants of suboptimal vaccine coverage and zero-dose occurrences in target communities. Alongside our projects to integrate childhood immunisation catch-up with SMC in Uganda and improve malaria vaccine uptake in Burkina Faso, this work will serve as key learning for the potential scale-up and delivery of similar programmes across contexts delivering SMC.

By working to understand the impact, feasibility and acceptability of this approach, we are building the evidence base to support ministries of health deliver novel catch-up strategies in similar contexts. Through regular meetings and timely dissemination of findings we will strengthen relationships with high-level stakeholders to influence the development of policy and practice.

Anticipated outcomes of this project include greater capability of the national EPI to tailor and deliver interventions to improve childhood vaccination coverage and uptake, and to enhance vaccination awareness, perception and confidence among target communities.

Greater coverage of routine childhood immunisation services will mean fewer zero-dose and under-immunised children. This will lead to reduced morbidity, mortality and socioeconomic burden attributed to vaccine-preventable diseases.

## References

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

Cover image: Community workers tracking zero-dose children

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