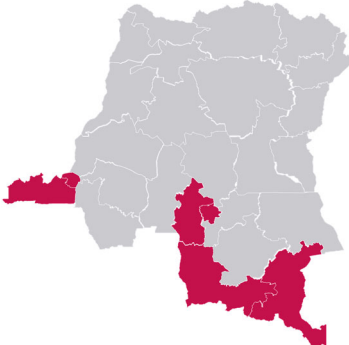




DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Support for COVID-19 Vaccination

MOMENTUM Routine Immunization Transformation and Equity in DRC

	<p>Where we work</p> <p>Country level: Ministry of Health, Expanded Program on Immunization, National Agency for Clinical Engineering and Digital Health</p> <p>Provinces: Haut Katanga, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Kinshasa, Kongo Central, Lualaba</p> <p>Health zones: 56</p>	<p>Population</p> <p>Country: 99 million (World Bank, 2022)</p> <p>Project-supported areas: 35.2 million</p>
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BACKGROUND

MOMENTUM Routine Immunization Transformation and Equity (the project) applies best practices and explores innovations to increase equitable immunization coverage in USAID-supported countries. The project is USAID's flagship technical assistance mechanism for immunization in 18 countries around the world. It builds countries' capacity to identify and overcome barriers to reaching zero-dose and under-immunized children and older populations with life-saving vaccines and other integrated health services, including rebuilding immunization systems adversely affected by the pandemic. It also supports COVID-19 vaccine rollout across countries with a wide range of circumstances and needs.

Despite significant increases in vaccine coverage in the past three decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to experience measles, polio, cholera and other disease outbreaks. The COVID-19 pandemic further interrupted efforts towards routine immunization. An estimated 67 million children worldwide missed routine immunization between 2019 and 2021—majority of whom were reportedly from low-and middle-income countries, such as DRC.¹ When COVID-19 vaccines became available in March 2021, the project supported the Ministry of Health's Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) in the introduction, roll-out, and integration of COVID-19 vaccines into routine service delivery through policy, planning, demand generation, community engagement, and data improvement.

AREAS OF SUPPORT

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10446229/>

PLANNING AND COORDINATION

In 2021, the project strengthened political commitment for COVID-19 vaccination through advocacy with high-level authorities and leaders. The project supported the development, implementation, and monitoring of the National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Plan and the COVID-19 National Acceleration Plan. These plans helped funders and vaccination actors design service delivery modalities to reach priority populations, monitor financial flows and leverage systems to improve access to and uptake of COVID-19 vaccination. In 2022, the project helped the EPI prepare and submit the Gavi COVID-19 vaccine delivery support application. It also organized development of health-zone level microplans that informed decision making and supply needs.

DEMAND GENERATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The project worked with communities to understand priority populations' intentions, motivations, and barriers to COVID-19 vaccination. Based on the results, it worked with nontraditional partners (e.g., private sector companies, journalists, and influencers) and Breakthrough ACTION—USAID's flagship global social and behavior change project—on messaging and dissemination strategies to generate vaccination demand and dispel related rumors.

DATA QUALITY AND MANAGEMENT

The rapid adoption of new digital tools to track client vaccination data led to many challenges. The project used root cause analyses and co-creation approaches to redesign systems to better fit the needs of vaccinators and managers in DRC. A project-led evaluation showed improved data quality and data use due to these efforts. From the analysis, the project focused support on the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination data collection tools and data assessment. It conducted a learning workshop at the national level to review data quality and findings and identify opportunities for improvement.

SERVICE DELIVERY

To reduce access barriers, the project advocated for and supported outreach, and mobile COVID-19 vaccination sites that brought vaccination services to where people lived and worked, in addition to fixed sites. The project strengthened the cold chain system at national and provincial levels to ensure supply met demand. With the provincial EPI, the project engaged in scale-up planning discussions and microplanning; leveraged organizational networks; developed communications materials; assembled teams; promoted vaccination events; and strengthened monitoring and management of adverse events following immunization at COVID-19 vaccination sites.

INTEGRATING COVID-19 VACCINATION INTO ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION

In 2021, the project supported efforts to mitigate disruptions in routine immunization due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It continued to provide technical assistance to the EPI for COVID-19 vaccination integration into routine immunization services, tools, and strategy at national and provincial levels until April 2024. This assistance included facilitating co-creation workshops; training trainers; implementing outreach and mobile vaccination sites; conducting data quality assurance; tracking vaccine distribution; engaging the community; and integrating vaccination services into DRC's universal health care plan.