



## A simple exercise book and increased government funding save lives in Jigawa

*Jamila Mohammed points to the 80-page exercise book she is clutching and exclaims, “This register has brought joy, happiness and hope to us!”*

The exercise-book register is designed to help Community Health Volunteers record new births and track the follow-up routine immunizations. It was developed under an approach called ‘Health Partnerships’.

Each Health Partnership creates four or five teams to follow up on the routine immunization of newborn babies in their area. Each team is made up of around eight volunteers. One of the volunteers who can read and write serves as the scribe and keeps the register of newborns and their routine immunization schedules. Jamila, who lives in Balago in Kiyawa Local Government Area (LGA), has been trained as a volunteer and scribe for her local team.

Newborns are grouped in the register by month of birth. Father, mother and child all have their names as well as their address or household name captured in the register. This makes it easy to follow up with parents in case of missed routine immunization visits.

### Example of inside page of the follow-up register:

MONTH..... YEAR .....									
FATHER'S NAME	MOTHER'S NAME	CHILD'S NAME	1st visit	2nd visit	3rd visit	4th visit	5th visit	Address/ Household Name	Name of CV

The health volunteers meet each month. Before each meeting, the scribe visits the local clinic to get the names of children who missed their immunization visits. At the meeting, the scribe informs the team members about these missed visits. A volunteer will then visit each household where a child missed a visit and help the parents or parent to take the child to the clinic for the next routine immunization session. The volunteers also help them to address anything that may be discouraging them from using the routine immunization services.

At Jamila’s Balago Health Clinic, routine immunization and antenatal services are held every Wednesday. Her fellow volunteers explain: “We now look forward to the next appointment with expectations. The newborn register helps us to easily identify children who have missed their visits.”

As a result of the follow-up by the volunteers, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of routine immunization visits. At Balago Clinic, the number of monthly visits in August 2009 was almost double the number of visits in February 2009, before the introduction of the register. This is a significant change, which Jamila and her team can congratulate themselves on supporting.



## Partnership for Reviving Routine Immunization in Northern Nigeria; Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Initiative

Health Partnerships is an approach introduced by the Partnership for Reviving Routine Immunization in Northern Nigeria and the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Initiative (PRRINN-MNCH). The Initiative is strengthening government capacity to reduce maternal and child mortality by improving delivery of health services, including routine immunization and antenatal services, in the four northern Nigerian states of Jigawa, Katsina, Zamfara and Yobe.

The partnerships also raise community issues with government staff. In Balago, the partnership asked the local administration to change the three clinic staff because of their poor treatment of clients. At a recent *majalisa* (gathering place for men), men from the Balago community said they were happy with the new staff in the clinic. "Routine immunization has brought smiles to our faces because our women and children are now healthier, and we are ready to do more, even if it means contributing money," emphasises Malam Umar Madaki, an elder and headmaster of Balago Primary School.

Nasir Bala, a PRRINN Local Engagement Consultant working with Jahun Gunduma, says, "Community ownership is the best thing to happen in the partnerships. The people are passionate about their involvement in it. The register gives them a sense of ownership and relevance. So, if there is any relapse on the part of government, it becomes easy for the people to advocate and demand for services as their right."

### **Jigawa budgets more for health care**

The political leadership and financial commitment shown by Governor Sule Lamido's administration is also important. The administration allocated an increased budget for essential Primary Health Care activities in 2009. According to Alhaji Usman Tahir, Director of Planning for Gunduma Health System Board, funding for Primary Health Care activities has increased from a near non-existent level about two years ago (before the start of the PRRINN-MNCH programme) to Naira 8.5 million a month in 2009.

According to Government statistics, over 364 health facilities are now conducting routine immunizations, compared with 161 about a year ago. A routine immunization fund has been introduced to cover the transport costs involved in vaccine distribution as well as supervision and monitoring costs.

The Government has also bought and distributed 288 motorcycles to the key staff in the ward. It has put in place a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for each of the nine Gunduma Councils and a Disease Surveillance Notification Officer for each of the 27 Local Government Areas.

With state-wide replication of the Health Partnerships being planned by the Government as one of its commitments in the health sector, there is hope that more lives of mothers and children will be saved across Jigawa State.

*By Cobham Nsa*