

REACHING THE UNREACHED: DIFFERENTIAL PLANNING FOR COVID-19 VACCINATION IN TRIBAL AREAS OF JHARKHAND, INDIA

Danish Umair Khan, SBC Specialist, UNICEF India

Background

Jharkhand is a predominantly tribal and forested state of India. Of the total population of 32.9 million (Census, 2011) in the state, 26% population belongs to schedule tribes. Most of the tribal population lives in rural areas and some of these areas are hard-to-reach and media-dark. Tribal people have their own customs, traditions, and languages. As most of the tribal people live in rural and hard-to-reach areas, reach of mainstream media is quite limited. Although Hindi is the main language of Jharkhand, tribal people have their own languages and dialects. Due to this lingual diversity, hard-to-reach and media-dark areas, reach of correct information to tribal people is a big challenge.

During the COVID-19 pandemic when strict lockdown was imposed and movement of people was limited; internet, radio, television, and social media became primary platforms for information sharing. Even if some tribal areas have internet connectivity the content of messages was in Hindi; therefore, it was difficult for people to understand the messages related to COVID-19 vaccination and COVID-19 appropriate behaviours (CAB). All these challenges made it difficult to promote COVID-19 vaccination among the tribal pockets of Jharkhand state.

Specific Aims & Objectives

The aim of the intervention is to improve demand and coverage of COVID-19 vaccination in tribal and hard-to-reach pockets of Jharkhand.

Specific objectives of intervention:

- Develop resource bank of communication and information resources in five tribal languages
- Develop materials suitable for local culture
- Develop network of local influencers
- Provide information in tribal languages through network of local influencers
- Clarification of misconceptions and myths related to COVID-19 vaccination

Methods

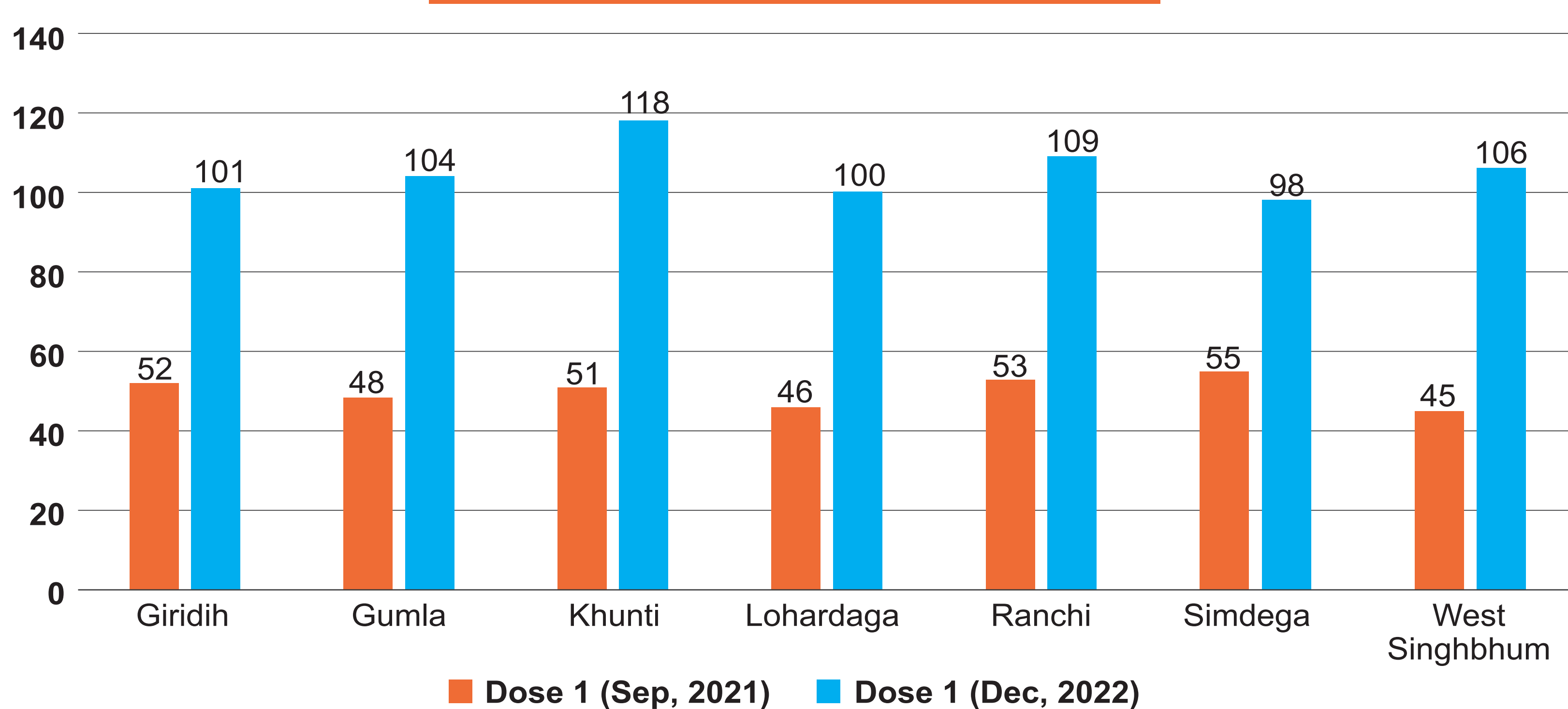
- Identification of low coverage and hard-to-reach tribal blocks
- Translation of communication materials in five tribal languages
- Engagement of local tribal influencers and leaders
- Engagement of social mobilizers from same villages to mobilize people
- Organization of village and Panchayat level vaccination camps
- Mid-media and local folk-shows to promote COVID-19 vaccination
- Regular monitoring of activities through field trips, data review, and reports
- Development of a resource bank of communication materials in various local languages

Results

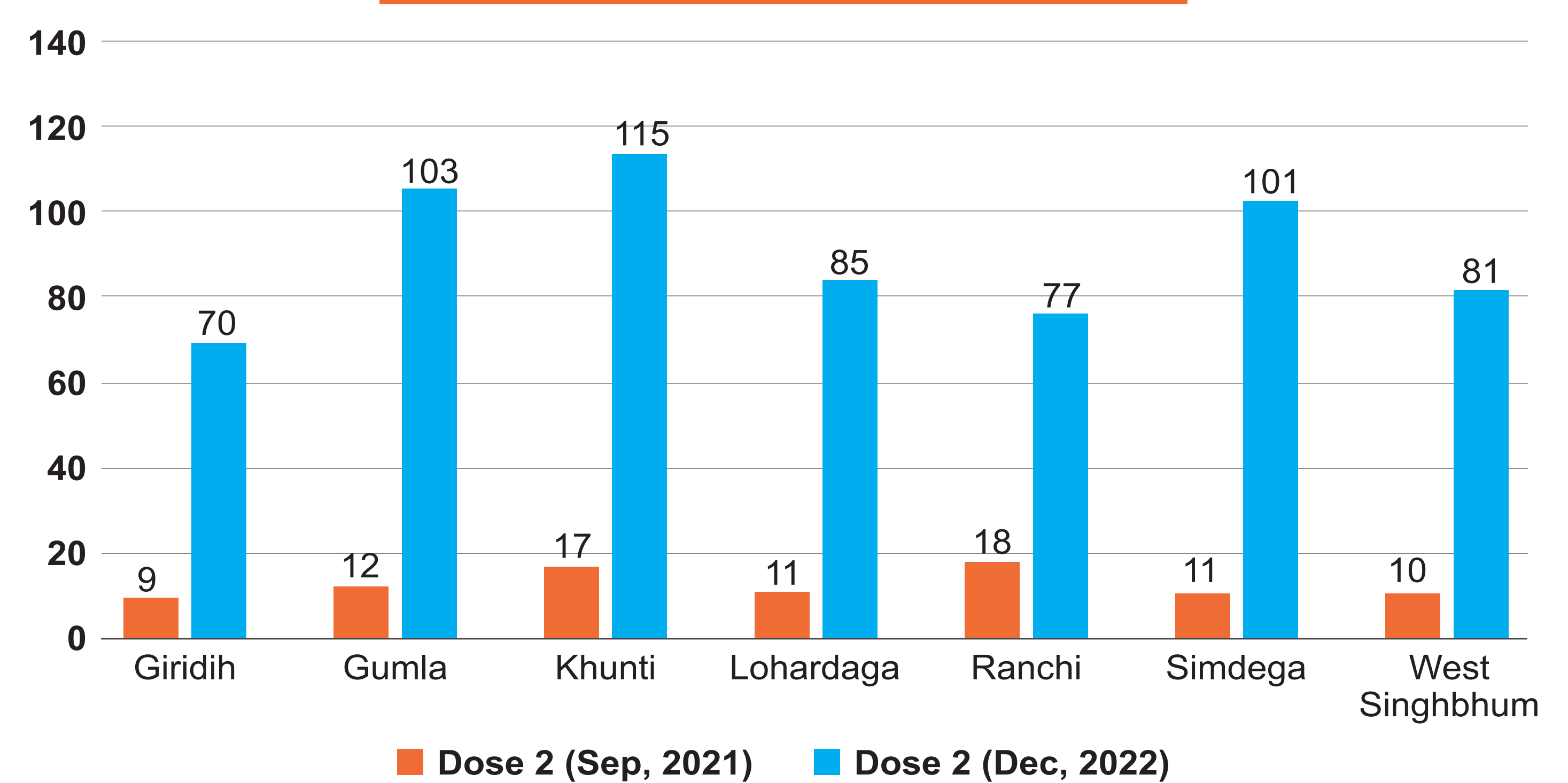
- Contextual tribal immunization strategy designed to promote routine immunization in tribal blocks
- Resource banks of communication materials on COVID-19 vaccination, routine immunization, nutrition, water and sanitation in tribal languages
- Network of 2000 local influencers
- Significant improvement in COVID-19 vaccination in intervention tribal pockets

Graphs/Figures

Dose 1 coverage for 18+ population



Dose 2 coverage for 18+ population



Conclusions

- **Differential approach** in planning is essential to reach and engage tribal and hard-to-reach population for routine immunization and other health services. This approach is specifically useful for routine immunization where usually hard-to-reach and media-dark areas remained unreached.
- Use of **tribal languages** for communication is an important component which will help us to provide contextualized information in local languages.
- **Engagement of tribal leaders** and community influencers should be strengthened for promotion of other health and nutrition behaviours. Engagement of community influencers will help in resolving vaccine hesitancy and clarifying myths and misconceptions. This will also help in bridging the gap and develop confidence between service providers and community.

Acknowledgements

National Health Mission, Government of Jharkhand
District Administration of Ranchi, Khunti, Gumla, Simdega, Giridih and West Singhbhum

References

<https://jrhms.jharkhand.gov.in/>
<https://www.cowin.gov.in/>