

# Vaccinating Health Workers in Africa: Effective Practices and Lessons Learned

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## Background

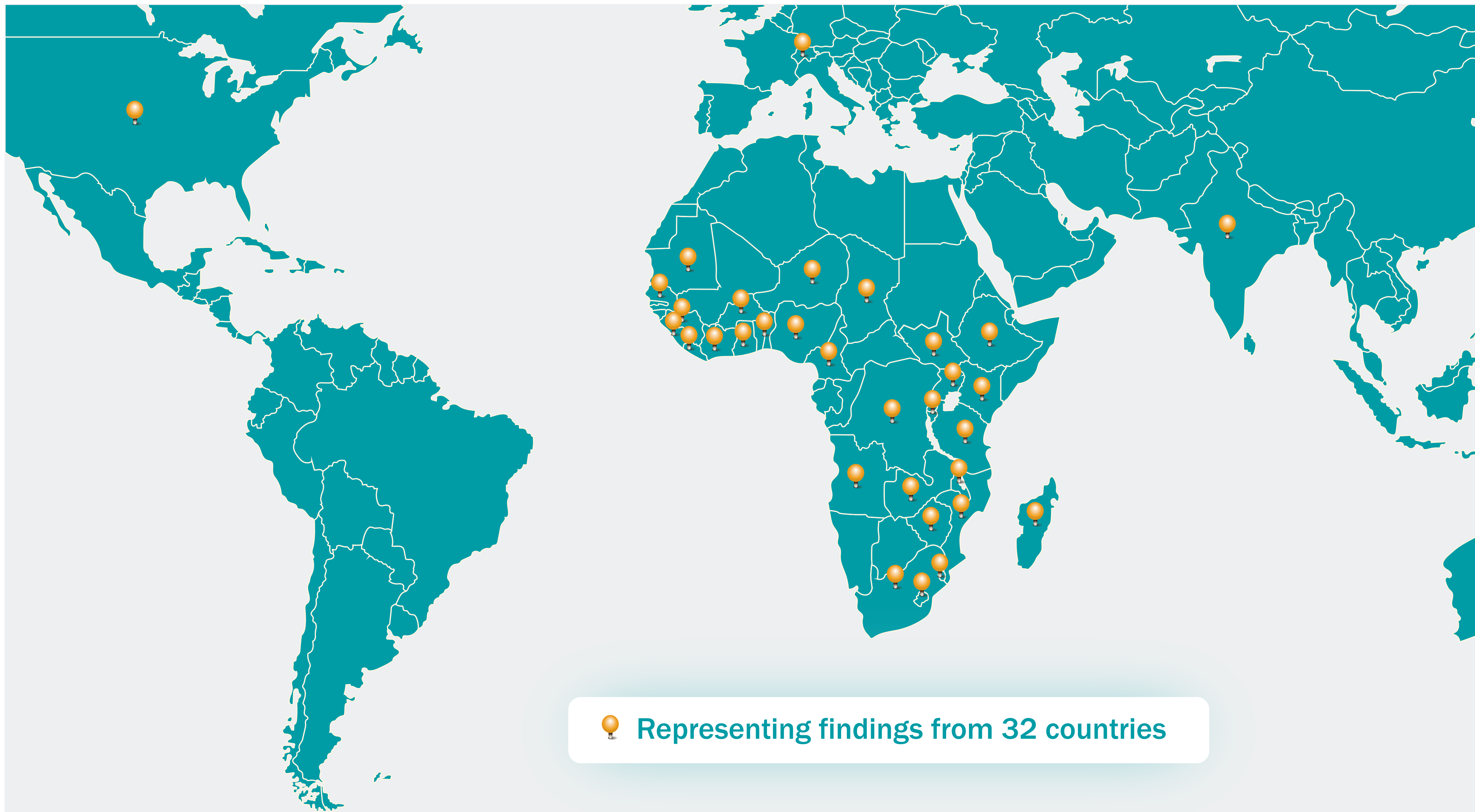
- The COVID-19 pandemic put a strain on health systems globally as routine programs competed with the pandemic for limited resources.
- Health workers are a high priority population for COVID-19 vaccination, both because they are regularly exposed to the virus, and because they are key to vaccinating the general population<sup>1</sup>.

## Specific Aims & Objectives

- The Knowledge SUCCESS project led this assessment to:
- Document overarching lessons learned and effective practices in COVID-19 vaccination of health workers (HWs), with a focus on Africa.
  - Document recommendations to inform the next emergency response and general health systems strengthening efforts.

## Methods

- In-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with 24 USAID-funded COVID-19 vaccine implementing partners (IPs) and USAID Mission staff representing over 14 countries in Southern Africa and Asia.
- Participants were recruited via email using purposive sampling.
- Conducted virtually via Zoom, lasting approximately one hour, and conducted in French or English.
- IDIs and FGDs were recorded, translated and transcribed.
- Data was coded and analyzed using grounded theory to identify common themes.
- Secondary data sources included findings from two Learning Circles<sup>2</sup> workshops in which COVID-19 IPs discussed what works and what doesn't regarding vaccination of high priority populations.
- Two three-day in-person regional Learning Circles cohorts were conducted — one in English and one in French — with 57 participants, including vaccine IPs and USAID Mission staff, from 29 countries in Africa.



## Results

HWs experience vaccine hesitancy due to: knowledge gaps about the COVID-19 virus and vaccine, COVID-19 stigma, cultural elements, myths and misconceptions, political and religious influence, perception of vaccine safety and efficacy, social media misinformation, and the 'swift' vaccine development period.

### Lessons learned and Recommendations for future emergencies:

- Provide continuous training of HWs throughout roll out of vaccines or other interventions.
- Create partnerships between government, non-governmental organizations and private sector.
- Ensure availability of national database of HWs for better vaccine tracking data.
- Prepare health systems for emergencies and build on existing health mechanisms.
- Identify and utilize community influencers for SBC.
- Develop quick/clear communication with and among HWs including providing open feedback channels, treating HWs as an audience, use of digital media such as WhatsApp to provide information, develop rumor tracking mechanisms.
- Sensitize the population on adult vaccines.
- Involve HWs in the early stages of communication campaign design.

“[Health workers] were afraid to approach their ill clients due to the lack of information and false information about the COVID-19 virus.”  
 (Implementing partner, Burkina Faso)

“Health workers didn't understand the vaccine, not just the COVID vaccine but especially adult vaccines in general... because in this country, we have traditionally vaccinated children.” (Implementing partner, Kenya)

“Health workers had concerns about the vaccine side effects and safety of the vaccine which made them hesitant to get vaccinated.”  
 (Implementing partner, Mozambique)

## Conclusions

This information will support COVID-19 vaccine implementing partners, host country governments, and institutions to identify, document, and apply lessons learned to inform the current COVID-19 pandemic and strengthen future emergency response and health system strengthening efforts.

### Acknowledgements

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### References

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2021). WHO SAGE roadmap for prioritizing uses of COVID-19 vaccines in the context of limited supply: an approach to inform planning and subsequent recommendations based on epidemiological setting and vaccine supply scenarios, first issued 20 October 2020, latest update 16 July 2021 (No. WHO/2019-nCoV/Vaccines/SAGE/Prioritization/2021.1). World Health Organization.

<sup>2</sup> Learning Circles. <https://knowledgesuccess.org/learning-circles/>



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