

A campaign involving Muslim clerics has increased uptake of polio vaccination in Nigeria

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A coalition campaign involving imams, Islamic school teachers, traditional rulers, doctors, journalists, and polio survivors is gradually turning the tide against polio vaccine rejection in northern Nigeria, according to experts from Nigeria writing in this week's *PLOS Medicine*.

Sani-Gwarzo Nasir (from the Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria) and colleagues describe how anti-polio propaganda, misconceptions, and violence against vaccinators present huge challenges to [polio eradication](#) in Nigeria but perhaps most profound is the rejection of vaccination by Muslim clerics.

However, according to the authors, the intense opposition to polio vaccination is systematically being reversed by the active engagement of imams to promote uptake of polio vaccination in areas worst hit by the disease. The authors describe the initiative in which selected imams have attended training sessions and the subsequent widespread community participation may have reduced the number of cases of polio in some regions of northern Nigeria.

The authors say: "This campaign demonstrates that traditional leaders in Nigeria could be relied upon to mobilize religious clerics, who in turn educated and mobilized the community. "

They continue: "Expanding the focus of the existing coalition campaign,

which encourages parents to accept the vaccine initiative and have their children immunized, to creating awareness in the community to demand polio vaccination will have a tremendous impact on the polio eradication initiative in Nigeria."

The authors add: "The sustainability of such efforts remains the greatest challenge to eradication of polio from Nigeria."

More information: Nasir S-G, Aliyu G, Ya'u I, Gadanya M, Mohammad M, et al. (2014) From Intense Rejection to Advocacy: How Muslim Clerics Were Engaged in a Polio Eradication Initiative in Northern Nigeria. *PLoS Med* 11(8): e1001687. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001687](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001687)

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