



## Active community participation to boost the Covid-19 vaccination coverage: the CoBoGo experience in the Boeny region of Madagascar



promote the vaccination.

The “Covid-19 vaccination campaign in the Boeny region of Madagascar: paving the road for worldwide vaccination coverage goal” (CoBoGo) gave the Fusco Group the great opportunity to create a proof of principle to boost future mass immunization campaigns in Madagascar, as well as similar settings in the future.

In a joint effort, the CoBoGo team succeeded in vaccinating more than 20.000 people in less than six months including vulnerable and neglected population groups such as women and prison inmates!

Since the very beginning, the management of the Covid-19 pandemic in Madagascar has been challenging. At the end of 2021 only 3,5% of the Malagasy population was fully vaccinated (Janssen, one dose). Not even the arrival of larger volumes of vaccines from the WHO’s COVAX initiative in 2022 could significantly improve the vaccination coverage of the Malagasy population.

The BNITM was given the opportunity to implement and promote a vaccination campaign together with local partner universities, the Ministry of Health and the regional authorities with the help of German government funds administered by the GIZ. The sites of the campaign were Mahajanga, the capital

city of the Boeny region, one of the hotspots of the Covid-19 pandemic. Underserved communities in three selected rural districts in the Boeny region were also included.

Our strategy to increase vaccination coverage was to conduct an awareness campaign targeting students and women, as they have been overlooked by such campaigns in the past. Along with mass communication (radio spots, posters, flyers and social media), we sought direct, face-to-face exchanges by organizing community-based initiatives such as round tables with student and women’s associations. *“I remember a young woman raising her hand and saying that she had heard that the Covid-19 vaccination led to loss of sexual desire. Suddenly on the other side of the room an older woman laughed and claimed that she had been vaccinated three times and that her desire to lay with her husband had not been affected at all.”* Reports Dr. Alexina Olivaso, a Malagasy young doctor in charge of the communication strategy and awareness campaign.

All field activities were coordinated by three amazing young Malagasy female doctors. We are delighted to have been able to introduce them to the field of public health, with the new perspective of continuing their careers in research!

The involvement of the Malagasy authorities culminated with the visit of representatives from the National Immunisation Programme of the Ministry of Health, which provided an opportunity to discuss the challenges faced by the public health system to ensure the continuity of our interventions.

Trust and participatory approaches break down barriers and vaccination hesitancy! CoBoGo confirms the importance and benefit of investing on community engagement for realizing successful health interventions.

After a first intense run to reach the nationwide vaccination target, international actors should now focus on measures aimed at establishing a routine for Covid-19 vaccination - for the Madagascar and for the right to a healthier world for all.



Focus group discussions during a vaccination session in the prison of Mahajanga, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2023.