

# THE VOICE OF OAFRESS CHAMPIONS

JULY 2024  
ISSUE 1



**A Champion  
Speaks to You**

**The Life of  
OAFRESS**

**OAFRESS in  
Pictures**

## ***Protecting Children***

**IMPROVING VACCINATION COVERAGE FOR  
CHILDREN IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA**

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# The Voice of OAFRESS Champions

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Launch of the OAFRESS Champions program and training of the first cohort in Saly, Senegal, June 2019.



# Editorial

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The magazine you are reading right now is the first edition of “The Voice of Champions”, the Journal initiated by OAFRESS (the Francophone African Organization for the Strengthening of Health Systems and Vaccination) “Champions” to communicate in their own words what they do and how this results in a positive impact in childhood and other vaccinations in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa.

Founded in September 2011 in Dakar (Senegal) during a consultation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), with the support of Gavi Vaccine Alliance and UNICEF, OAFRESS is a platform that brings together networks of more than 2,500 CSOs from 18 French-speaking African countries and Haiti (please see the map on page 12).

To carry out its mission, the cornerstone of which is advocacy for the creation and promotion of effective vaccination and health systems in French-speaking Africa, OAFRESS has adopted an innovative mechanism, with women and men whose conviction, dedication, commitment and self-sacrifice make them standard bearers of a noble cause. These are the “Champions”, as we will call them. They have chosen as their objective to actively contribute to improving the outcomes of vaccination services in their respective countries, and as such, they want to excel as true Champions.



But beyond excellence, they want to make it known what they do, they want to tell their own story through various channels, including this magazine that should come out four times per year.

And to ensure their voices are heard, all the Champions will contribute to this magazine their reports, analyses, and interviews, devoted to their activities and/or the dynamics of vaccination in their countries and the positive impact of their work on the proportion of children who are vaccinated and in good health.

The Voice of Champions is also intended to be a knowledge-sharing tool, a platform for sharing ideas made available to all stakeholders involved in the vaccination chain, for which a major purpose is to make it known what is being done to improve vaccination coverage in the countries of the OAFRESS geographical area.

I hope you enjoy this and future issues,

**Nadzombé Datagni**

President of the Board of Directors of OAFRESS

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# QUESTION OF THE DAY

By the OAFRESS  
Champions: Saliou Balde,  
Senegal and Harirata  
Seone, Burkina Faso.

*Africa sees a resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases, with measles leading in Gabon.*



*Integrated vaccination activities in Mouila, Central-South Ngounie, Gabon, July 2023, by the Expanded Program on Immunization and partners.*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Africa has faced an increase in epidemics of vaccine-preventable diseases since 2021. Specifically, nearly 17,500 cases of measles were reported in the African Region between January and March 2022, an increase of around 400% compared to the same period in 2021.

Gabon experienced measles epidemics in all health departments in 2016 and 2017. The 2016 epidemic caused 10 deaths among 1509 cases (767 per million), whereas in 2017 there were no deaths among 1076 cases (531 per million).

In 2020, a single health department in the Woleu-Ntem health region reported an outbreak of measles from the fifteenth



epidemiological week onward. In 2021, an outbreak of measles occurred in the health department of Bendjé (Port Gentil), starting in the thirty-second epidemiological week. The measles risk analysis carried out in 2021 showed that around 128,235 children under 5 years old were not vaccinated and were at risk of getting measles. In 2022, amidst the Covid pandemic, this number increased to 167,198 children. Measles epidemics affect especially remote, rural poor but also poor urban populations.

Since the introduction of the measles vaccine in 1997, the Gabonese government has initiated five vaccination campaigns. The first campaign was a multi-year sweeping campaign targeting children aged between 9 months and 14 years old. The two follow-up campaigns, in 2007 and 2022, targeted children aged between 9 months and 5 years old. Another response campaign in 2017 again targeted children aged between 9 months and 5 years old, with as an end result the vaccination of 200,648 children, about 75 % of the target population. The last vaccination campaign, in 2022, was coupled with the administration of VITamineA.

Despite these efforts, measles has not yet been eliminated in Gabon. Vaccination coverage in recent years remains below 65%. This is 30 per cent below what is needed to ensure collective immunity (95%). This indicator makes it extremely urgent to interrupt the chain of transmission and to protect all children aged 6 months to 5 years. To achieve this, good collaboration between Champions of OAFRESS, the CSOs they represent and the State would: 1) inform affected populations, 2) motivate affected populations to be vaccinated, and 3) ensure liaison between government services and target populations to eradicate this epidemic.

**In 2022, 167,198 children in Gabon were exposed to measles, highlighting the urgency of a mass vaccination.**



# A CHAMPION SPEAKS TO YOU

By Eugène Bakouan

## How do you define the OAFRESS Champions program for vaccination advocacy and why did you agree to be one?

The OAFRESS Champions program for Vaccination Advocacy is one of OAFRESS' flagship programs. Its main objective is to create a pool of competent resource people in countries to carry the OAFRESS message on vaccination issues and address major challenges linked to vaccination and delivery of health services in French-speaking Africa. As illustrated by examples in this issue, and in upcoming issues of our Journal, our advocacy contributes to an increase in the proportion of children who are vaccinated in the target areas.

I agreed to be an OAFRESS Champion because I have been a civil society actor active on vaccination issues for more than 10 years. In addition, I thought that this would allow me to bring the voice of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to governments' health and vaccination services.

## What pride can you share today about the OAFRESS Champions Program?

The pride that I can share in connection with the Champions program is their recognition and their collaboration in official organizations in charge of vaccination.

For instance, as a Champion, I participated in a meeting of the regional working group on immunization, in stakeholder consultations for



*Eugène Bakouan, OAFRESS Champion, Burkina Faso.*

the development of GAVI 5.0 strategies in 2019 in Geneva, while one of my colleagues did the same thing in 2019 in Brazzaville and recently in Lomé in March 2024. Concrete results of 2019 actions: contribution to making a decision to give at least 10% of grants (TCA-FAE and RSS) from GAVI to local CSOs in countries supported by GAVI.

## What are the priorities for you to develop within this program?

My priorities are basically:

- For countries with low vaccination coverage, to come up with a plan to generate a demand for vaccination through community engagement,
- To offer technical support to countries in the development of national immunization strategies and GAVI grants,
- To support strengthening country platforms on an organizational level.



# INTERVIEW

## WITH A STAKEHOLDER



By Ouambi Sama, OAFRESS  
Champion, Burkina Faso

### Who am I ?

I am Wiyao Katchoo, MD, Director of Health for the Binah Prefecture in the Kara region of Togo.

### What is the level of collaboration with POSCVI-TOGO?

We have been working with the POSCVI-TOGO platform for over 6 years through its member CSO. This platform supports our health district in community mobilization to create demand for vaccination services and to combat reluctance and rumors related to vaccination. To achieve these objectives, it carries out activities such as:

- Social mobilization in vaccine-hesitant communities,
- The organization of home visits to reluctant households through its Papa Champion strategies,
- Carrying out community dialogues in favor of vaccination,
- Support for research on children who are incompletely vaccinated, or not at all.

### What have you accomplished together with POSCVI-TOGO?

Thanks to the support of POSCVI-TOGO, our district went from category 4 (low access and use of services with Penta 1 coverage < 90% and Penta 1 / RRI dropout rate  $\geq$  10%) in 2019 to category 1 (good access and good use of services with Penta 1 coverage  $\geq$  90% and Penta 1 / RRI dropout rate < 10%) in 2023.



Dr. KATCHOOU Wiyao in front of the CSSP OUAKE, Benin, investigating cases of measles during cross-border meetings for the vaccination response in Togo, April 18, 2024.

Overall, with the support of POSCVI-TOGO, vaccination coverage increased from:

- BCG from 65.5% in 2021 to 83.8% in 2023;
- DTC-HepB-Hib1 from 79.4% in 2021 to 97.3% in 2023;
- DTC-HepB-Hib3 from 71.7% in 2021 to 96.9% in 2023;
- RRI from 67.2% in 2021 to 94.3% in 2023 and,
- RR2 from 60.2% in 2021 to 82.9% in 2023.

Likewise, through community dialogues we were able to significantly improve the support of villages and towns reluctant to vaccinate, in particular: KETAO ZONGO, EWAIYO, N'DJEI, KOUYORIA, LAMA-DESSI, EGUIMDE, HAMEAU PEULH, SOGODÉ an SIRKA.

During the activities carried out in the last quarter of 2023 in our district, POSCVI-TOGO supported the organization of 12 community dialogues in vaccine-reluctant villages, always with the financial support of the GAVI Alliance.

Likewise, it supported the organization of a census of children in households in health areas with low vaccination coverage, which made it possible to identify 1,800 children through Kobocollect, including around 900 incompletely vaccinated children and 85 zero-dose children who are now being vaccinated as shown in the image below:

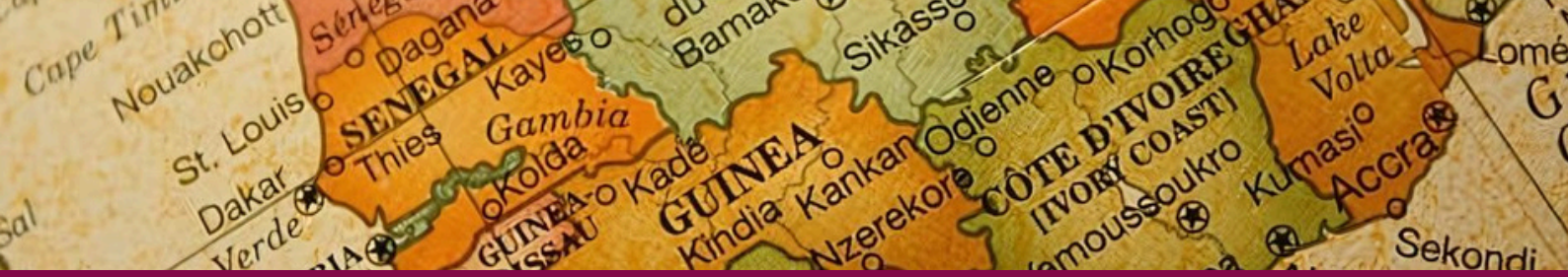
### **What recommendation can you make?**

We would like to see a further strengthening of the financial, material and human support given by partners to POSCVI-TOGO.



**Vaccination of zero-dose children in nomadic communities in the village of Tanfaro, Binah Health District in Togo, with the support of POSCVI-TOGO.**





# The Life of OAFRESS

By the OAFRESS Champions: Gérard Koulahoue, Togo and  
Andy Katompa Mwana Mwangu, DRC

**OAFRESS, launched in 2014, aims to strengthen health systems and vaccination in Francophone Africa.**

## Creation of OAFRESS

After the definition of the priorities of civil society in the region for more equitable access to care in September 2011 in Dakar, it took until November 2014 for OAFRESS (Francophone African Organization for Strengthening Health and Vaccination Services) to be officially launched, thus crystallizing the aspirations of French-speaking civil society for a more robust and inclusive health system. Then, in September 2018, during its Constitutive General Assembly, a solid foundation for the organization was laid by establishing its General Assembly, Board of Directors and Executive Secretariat as its governing components. Their task is to ensure the effective and transparent management of its activities.

Today OAFRESS is a structured network of national civil society platforms, spread across 18 French-speaking African countries. Its purpose is to vaccinate all children, and to

ensure access to health services for all residents of disadvantaged and hard-to-reach communities through the coordinated action of civil society.

Based on the priorities defined by French-speaking Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), OAFRESS's mission is to coordinate advocacy actions in favor of more equitable access to healthcare in French-speaking Africa; to collect and share strategic information for strengthening health systems; and to develop and strengthen partnerships between CSOs, national and regional public institutions, the private sector and North-South partners.

## Early Developments

Since its creation, OAFRESS has established itself as an essential pillar in the health landscape in French-speaking Africa. Its journey, marked by a continued commitment to equitable access to healthcare and vaccination, testifies to his growing importance in the region.





Its strategic development plan was defined during the General Assembly in 2018 to have four main axes. These are 1) strengthening the capacities of member platforms, 2) collecting resources to mobilize communities in favor of vaccination, 3) advocate for strong health systems in French-speaking Africa and 4) produce and disseminate evidence to better inform strategic choices to reduce the number of unvaccinated children in French-speaking African countries.

Following technical, financial and administrative assistance from the Gavi Alliance, OAFRESS undertook a set of ambitious activities.

During the three-day long “ConneXion 2022” conference in Niamey, Niger, it brought together Civil Society Organizations from its 18 countries and representatives of their Governments (Ministry of Health) and partners such as the Gavi Alliance, the West African Health Organization - WAHO, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, and Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), around the theme of “Innovative partnerships between government and civil society for partially vaccinated and unvaccinated children in the context of a health and security crisis”. This meeting made it possible to share experiences and best practices and lessons learned from civil society to improve vaccination indicators and reach unvaccinated children in their communities. Also, each country developed a joint roadmap (Civil Society-Government/Min. Health.) to reach unvaccinated and partially vaccinated children.

Another decisive moment was in May 2021, with the first sovereign General Assembly of OAFRESS, held in Nouakchott, Mauritania. This meeting marked a major turning point for the organization, by strengthening its positioning as a key and essential player in health in French-speaking Africa.

Among the successes of the strategic plan is the establishment of a regional advocacy program in favor of vaccination, and the training of OAFRESS Champions for advocacy. This has played a crucial role in strengthening local and regional health and vaccination capacities. Since May 2021 this program has been supported by the NGO Partnership for Transparency (PTF); their team of resource people provides mentoring to the OAFRESS Champions for advocacy.

## **OAFRESS has established itself as an essential pillar in the healthcare landscape of Francophone Africa.**

During the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, OAFRESS mobilized its member platforms across various countries to fight against this disease. Through dynamic awareness campaigns, it amplified essential messages on precautions to limit the spread of the virus. In addition, OAFRESS mobilized and encouraged its members to distribute and install affordable and effective handwashing devices in communities, a fundamental measure in preventing the transmission of the virus.

Advocacy remains at the heart of the action of OAFRESS, which works tirelessly to raise awareness, mobilize, and influence decision-makers in favor of policies and investments favorable to public health. Indeed, since July 2020, it has been committed with the partners of the Global Financing Mechanism (GFM) to strengthening the technical skills of civil society in French-speaking Africa, to develop their technical expertise to analyze the investment priorities of their countries, and to check the points of discordance with the real needs of the country as identified by

the national health plan and their own observations. Based on their findings, they develop an advocacy strategy with a measurable objective of improving an underfunded priority issue in the investment priorities.

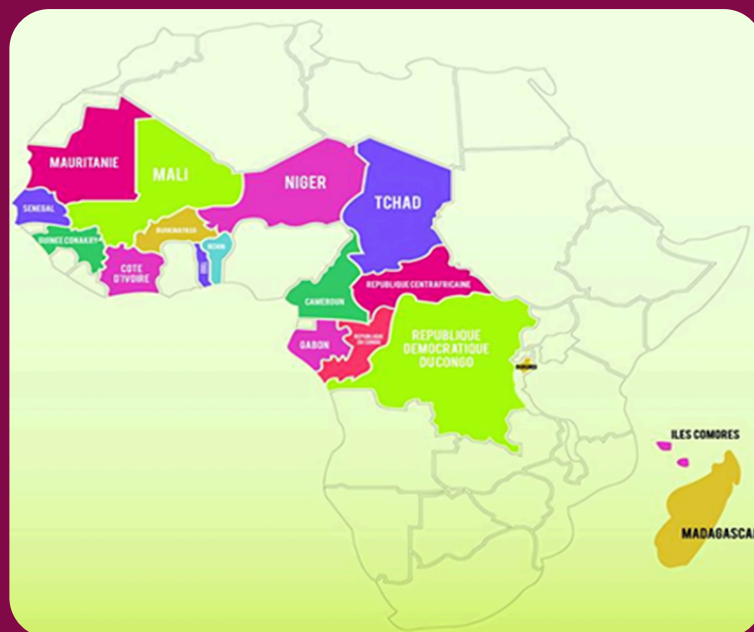
It also acts by facilitating South–South support where civil society actors from one country offer support to those in other nations, thus strengthening local capacities and promoting the sharing of experiences and good practices. This initiative has already benefited countries such as Guinea, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Chad, Niger, Central African Republic and Haiti, demonstrating its regional and international reach.

### Perspectives

At the heart of its success are its strong partnerships. With key players such as the Gavi Alliance, Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), Action Santé Mondiale, PAI, WHO, and others, OAFRESS maintains close collaboration to maximize its impact and ensure sustainable results in the field of health and vaccination.

Likewise, events such as “Connexion 2018” in Nairobi (Kenya) and “Connexion 2022” in Niamey (Niger) helped catalyze partnerships and synergies for more effective collective action.

OAFRESS therefore intends to strengthen its partnerships in order to maximize its efforts in favor of vaccination in the near future. At the same time, OAFRESS plans to mobilize more technical assistance and resources to strengthen the capacities of its member platforms, in order to ensure effective and equitable implementation of vaccination programs across the African continent. In this pivotal period, OAFRESS continues to chart its path with determination and commitment. Through its innovative initiatives and its dynamic network, it embodies the hope of a future where health is a reality accessible to all, in all its diversity and cultural richness.



The OAFRESS member countries.

# OAFRESS IN PICTURES

## CAPTURING ADVOCACY FOR HEALTH



Vaccination of a zero-dose child by Champion Harirata Seone, Burkina Faso.



Jonas Mwangue presenting the Strategic Development Plan of OAFRESS at the First Constitutive General Assembly in 2018, Nairobi, Kenya.



Augustin Kola from Togo receiving his Champions of OAFRESS training certificate from Dr. Clarisse L. Loumou, Dakar, 2019.



The OAFRESS Champions with Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) representative Pietronella van den Oever at the 'ConneXion 2022' sub-regional conference in Niamey, Niger.



Claire Sambou delivering her remarks at the inaugural Constitutive General Assembly of OAFRESS in 2018 in Nairobi, Kenya.



Luc Zikehouli, OAFRESS champion, at a follow-up meeting on routine vaccination in Bas-Sassandra, Côte d'Ivoire.



A group of OAFRESS Champions at 'Connexion 2022' in Niamey proudly display their certificates of recognition.



OAFRESS First Constitutive General Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya, 2018.



OAFRESS Champions at the Gavi 5.0 Consultation, August 2019, Geneva, Switzerland.



# The Voice of OAFRESS Champions

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### **Protecting Children**

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