Experiences and Lessons from COVID-19 Vaccination in East Champaran: a remote district in Bihar, India

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Introduction: COVID-19 vaccination is a race against virus. Quick and complete vaccination of maximum eligible population would be critical in ending the acute phase of the pandemic and thus decimate the emergence of new variants. India, a geographically, demographically, and culturally diverse country, embarked the daunting task of vaccinating more than a billion people in January 2021. Methods: This paper reports best practices and innovations adopted by a remote district East Champaran, which enabled it to achieve many milestones in COVID-19 vaccination. The main factor that paved the way to success was people-centric approach and strong ownership of the program by the district administration. COVID-19 vaccination in East Champaran was driven by constant innovation, adaptive microplanning, and dynamic implementation strategy in rapidly evolving environment of SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Our study documents how the best use of existing resources by tweaking it to suit the new health needs, forging and fostering partnerships, and open two-way communication with the beneficiaries during a public health emergency could strengthen and catalyze prevention and control activities in the desired direction. Results: East Champaran crossed several landmarks in COVID-19 vaccination program, it became the first district to vaccinate >95% of its eligible population with first dose and second dose of COVID-19 vaccine. The first block, the first municipality, the first municipal council, and the first municipal corporation to immunize all adults were also from East Champaran.

Conclusion: Lessons and experiences from COVID-19 vaccination program in East Champaran could be emulated and implemented in other Low-to-Middle Income Countries facing similar challenges of health system inefficiencies and vaccine hesitancy.