PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW ESIEBO

99.9 percent is not 100 percent

Aminu Ahmed Tudun-Wada knows what polio takes from a child. He contracted the disease as a young boy in Kano, Nigeria, and was left paralyzed.

Decades later, when Nigeria was struggling to eradicate polio, Aminu decided that he would use his experience to help protect other children.

He brought together polio survivors and began going door to door, talking with parents about vaccination. The survivors told their stories. They showed families the effects of polio. And they urged parents to make sure their children never had to go through the same experience.

By 2021, the Polio Survivors Group that Aminu founded had grown to more than 400 members. Their work helped Nigeria reach a milestone that once seemed impossible: In 2020, the World Health Organization certified Nigeria, and the entire African region, free of wild poliovirus.

I think about people like Aminu whenever we talk about ending polio. Eradication is about children who will never know what it means to lose the ability to walk. It is about parents who will never have to watch a healthy child become paralyzed by a disease that vaccines can prevent.

And it is about making sure the people who remember polio become the last generation that does. Rotary has been part of this fight for more than four decades. Together with our partners, we have helped vaccinate more than 3 billion children, contributed more than $3 billion to the global effort, and reduced cases of wild poliovirus by 99.9 percent.

But 99.9 percent is not 100 percent.

Wild poliovirus remains endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As long as it circulates anywhere, children everywhere remain at risk. And even after wild poliovirus disappears from a country, we must maintain strong immunization and surveillance systems so the virus cannot find a way back.

Aminu could have looked at his own experience and asked, "Why me?" Instead, he asked a different question: "How can I make sure this does not happen to another child?" That is the spirit we need now.

The final mile of any journey can be the hardest. But we have walked too far, worked too hard, and protected too many children to stop here.

Let us remember why we began. Let us listen to those who have experienced polio. Let us be the generation that creates lasting impact and ensures no one ever experiences polio again.

YINKA
President, Rotary International