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ENSURING BIOSECURITY AND BIOSAFETY.

The transportation of biological specimens across laboratory networks is critical especially during a public health emergency like COVID-19. As the virus spreads in Nigeria, health facilities in the Federal Capital Territory – where the third highest number of cases emerged (as at mid-May 2020) – began refusing HIV and tuberculosis (TB) sample processing for fear of contracting COVID-19, while also reducing their operational hours.

THE ROLE OF NiSRN. First established in 2018 by the Nigeria Ministry of Health, the National Integrated Specimen Referral Network (NiSRN) is designed to increase access to laboratory testing through safe and secure specimen transport by private-sector third-party logistics (3PL) providers. With the rise of COVID-19, GHSC-PSM ensured NiSRN continued programmatic implementation while meeting biosecurity and biosafety standards.

MAINTAINING ACCESS TO LABORATORY TESTING.

Between March and April 2020, GHSC-PSM deployed a five-pronged safety and health approach for project, health facility and 3PL staff:

Virtual Meetings
Mask-up
Mentoring
Personal-**H**ygiene
Social Distancing

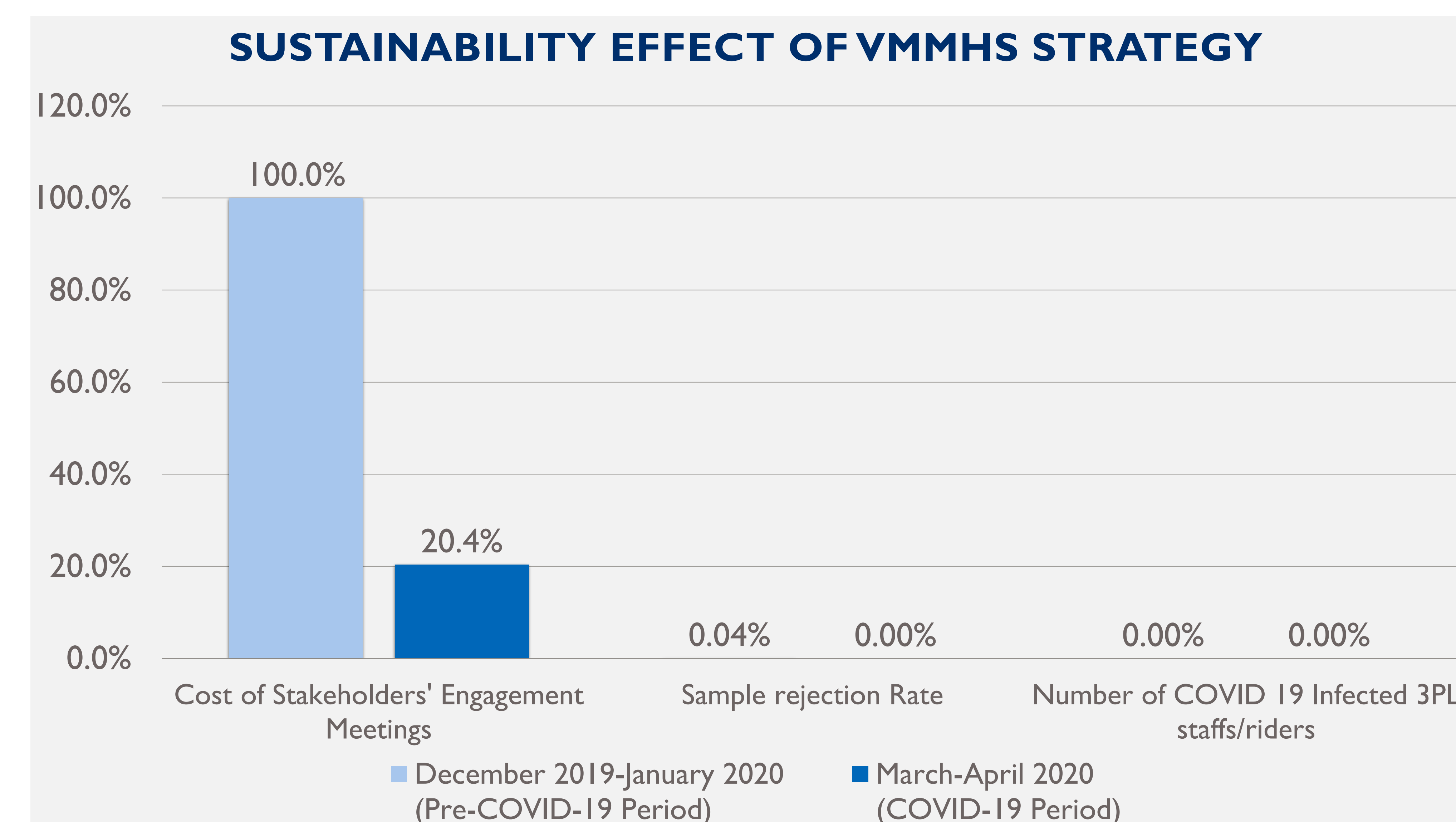
**VMMHS
STRATEGY**

Following implementation, GHSC-PSM carried out a comparative analysis of two periods – December 2019-January 2020 and March-April 2020 – to measure the impact of the VMMHS strategy on NiSRN.



HIV samples transported by motorbike in Nigeria. Photo credit: GHSC-PSM/Anthony Abu

RESULTS. The VMMHS strategy reduced operational cost of stakeholder engagement meetings to 20.4% of its original pre-COVID-19 cost. Additionally, sample rejection rate dropped from 0.04% to 0%. Lastly, **3PL staff reported zero COVID-19 infections despite working in high-risk circumstances.**



EXPANDING NiSRN FOR COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19, NiSRN demonstrated safe and reliable HIV and TB specimen transportation. With the onset of the pandemic and early adoption of the VMMHS strategy, cost effectiveness and efficiency was achieved while simultaneously minimizing the risk of staff exposure to COVID-19. As a result, NiSRN can be expanded for COVID-19 specimen transport.