

SUSTAINABLE IMMUNIZATION FINANCING

Summary Digest

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Parliamentarians take on immunization funding in Democratic Republic of Congo

At the Fourth GAVI Partners' Forum, held on 18-20 November 2009 in Hanoi, Vietnam, nearly 450 global immunization partners listened as the Honorable Ms. Vicky Katumwa, Member of Parliament, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), described how she and fellow Members of Parliament (MP) became immunization financing advocates *par excellence*.

During a Sustainable Immunization Financing (SIF) briefing in Kinshasa, DRC held on 23 September 2009—which attracted fifteen MPs from both the National Assembly and the Senate—MPs were surprised to learn that the DRC has provided none of the funding for the immunization budget. They further discovered that theirs was the only Central African country currently in arrears on its Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) co-financing commitments for new and underutilized vaccines.

According to its agreement with GAVI, by September 2009, DRC was to have paid US\$1.3m in co-payments for pentavalent and yellow fever vaccines for 2010. In 2010 and 2011, the GAVI co-payments will increase to US\$1.5m and US\$1.6m, respectively, as the country begins using pneumococcal vaccine. However, there is no line item in the health sector budget to cover the GAVI co-payments or, indeed, any routine Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) costs.

Sabin sponsors immunization financing "Talk Program" in Nepal

Sabin sponsored the first of a series of three advocacy briefings on immunization financing on 11 September 2009, in Kathmandu, Nepal. The focus of this introductory meeting was to elaborate a coherent set of advocacy messages for long-term financing of Nepal's Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI). Representatives of the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP), the Ministry of Finance, and Parliament of Nepal kicked off what is intended to be an ongoing dialogue among these three institutions. In the words of the Honorable Chet Raj Pant of the National Planning Commission: "Communication is the biggest challenge to the success of our health



Panelists at the GAVI Partner's Forum in Hanoi, Vietnam where attendees discussed opportunities and challenges related to immunizations and GAVI's policies.

Also attending the SIF briefing was a representative from the Ministry of Budget. At his prompting, the Minister of Budget, M. Michel Lokola Elemba, promptly authorized the Ministry of Finance to begin making the outstanding GAVI co-payments. After a long process, a partial payment of US\$511,000 was released on 30 November 2009. The Ministry of Finance promised to pay the remaining \$819,000 by year's end.

Hon. Ms. Katumwa and her colleagues on the Social Affairs Commission have oversight responsibility for the health sector and, after the briefing, they, too, went to work. In its initial proposal last October, the

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system." Dr. Shyam Raj Upreti, Director of Child Health Division, MOHP, highlighted the need for all three parties to consider immunization as an investment in the future of Nepal's people and Dr. VV Pradhan, Chief of Policy, Planning and International Cooperation Division, MOHP, made a presentation emphasizing immunization's contribution to achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4, as well as MDG1, MDG2, and MDG5.

While the country's overall health budget has increased in recent years, rising immunization costs—due in large part to the introduction of new vaccines—have

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SIF sparks commitment to achieve sustainable immunization financing in Sierra Leone



Meeting participants after the opening ceremony of the "Symposium for Parliamentarians on Sustainable Immunization Financing" held in Aberdeen, Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is currently transitioning from emergency to long-term planning after a decade long conflict during which the nation's EPI was fully supported by donors. The nation has seen a significant increase in vaccine coverage, which went from 34% at the end of the conflict in 2002 to 68% in 2008.

On 6 November 2009, SIF co-hosted a symposium in Freetown that briefed key stakeholders on the need for sustainable immunization financing and elicited their support to achieve it.

The conference, opened by the Speaker of the House of Parliament, Honorable Justice Abel Stronge, was attended by members of the Parliamentary Health Committee, chairmen of several other parliamentary committees, Paramount Chiefs, representatives from the ministries of health and finance, WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International and local journalists.

Participants generated a number of recommendations including: strengthening collective action, especially between parliamentarians, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, and Ministry of Finance and Economic Development; increasing government collaboration with external stakeholders including the private sector, community service organizations and the media; supporting relevant legislation; and strengthening collaboration with the District Councils.

The symposium ended with a firm commitment from all participants, including Chairlady of the Parliamentary Health Committee, Honorable Bintu Myers, to implement the recommendations to ensure the achievement of sustainable immunization financing in Sierra Leone.

Ethiopia's First Lady Hosts nation's first SIF sponsored parliamentary briefing

On 28 October 2009, Ethiopia's First Lady and Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Her Excellency Azeb Mesfine—along with 21 members of parliament and representatives of Sabin, UNICEF and WHO—convened an introductory meeting to discuss challenges and approaches to achieve sustainable immunization financing.

Given the country's size, social heterogeneity and still developing health infrastructure, the Ministry of Health has so far concentrated on ensuring that immunization coverage improves. Its efforts have paid off. Ethiopia's EPI currently saves an estimated 100,000 children annually. Last year, however, 381,000 children below five died, mainly from preventable causes. Increasing immunization coverage is eliminating up to 25% of that mortality, contributing to achieving Millennium Development Goal 4 (MDG4).

A number of challenges were discussed in the meeting, including the burdens the government faces in meeting donors' fiduciary demands. A second problem stems from the often long lead

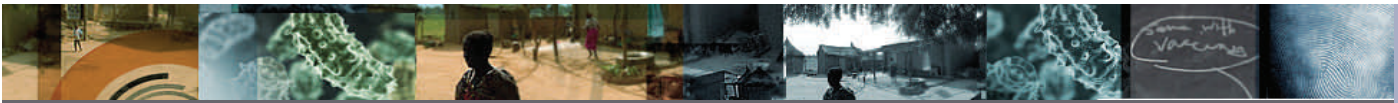
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SIF facilitates timely immunization financing discussion between Cameroon's Mayors Association and EPI

The timing couldn't have been better for Sabin Senior Program Officer Jonas Mbwangue to arrange a meeting between Cameroon's Association of Mayors and the Ministry of Health and Population to discuss EPI financing ideas. Cameroon is set to begin a highly anticipated decentralization process—which will grant state and local authorities greater autonomy in the financing of public programs—on 1 January 2010.

The Association of Mayors, an organization with more than 300 municipality representatives, will receive block grants from the government and have the opportunity to create budgets for their municipalities that could include specific line items for immunization.

Attending the 11 November 2009 meeting were the Association's directors, Deputy EPI Manager, Dr. David Mekontso and the Sabin Vaccine Institute. After the meeting, the Association of Mayors began formulating immunization budgeting recommendations for the mayors, including exploring new areas of taxation as a possible funding source. A second meeting will take place in February 2010.



Parliamentarians take on funding (continued from page 1)

government proposed allocating just 5% of its total 2010 budget to health and there were no clearly itemized funds for immunization. For the first time, parliamentarians objected. They requested and received a report on the 2009 budget.. They demanded a revised budget with line items for vaccines and operations that, together, would cover a great portion of projected 2010 routine immunization program costs. Over the ensuing week, fifteen MPs spoke in favor of increasing the health budget to 15%, which would meet the nation's commitment under the Abuja Declaration.

The immunization financing problems are exposing the MPs to even bigger issues. The final health budget won't be known until the end of the year, but Hon. Katumwa and her National Assembly colleagues have already moved their country closer to the sustainable immunization financing goal. This was good news indeed to the GAVI partners gathered in Hanoi.

Talk Program in Nepal (continued from page 1)

left Nepal ever more dependent on external donors to fund EPI.

Meeting participants agreed that advocating for the immunization program will mean demonstrating the association between program performance and health outcomes (e.g. fewer measles cases). Finance Ministry and Planning Commission officials have a general understanding of the contributions of immunization to health and economic growth, but the investment case requires demonstrating these figures using the country's own data. The investment case can then be used to inform the national budget process, and this is where parliamentarians play a crucial role. Honorable Sandhya Devi, President, Women, Children, and Social Welfare Committee, said her committee would be pleased to advocate for greater funding for EPI. To that end, she requested that all 60 members of her committee be briefed on the contributions of EPI to health and economic development at the next meeting. This meeting—the second in the series of parliamentary briefings—is being planned in collaboration with UNICEF, and will take place in early 2010.

DRC's Immunization Champion



Ms. Vicky Katumwa, MP and Vice-Chair, Social Affairs Commission, DRC at the Fourth GAVI Partners' Forum in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Ms. Vicky Katumwa, MP and Vice-Chair, Social Affairs Commission, has emerged as an exemplar parliamentarian advocating for the health of the people of the DRC. She has served as MP since 2003 and was a signatory of the Global and Inclusive Agreement which allowed the DRC to hold the nation's first democratic elections in 2006.

Katumwa had quite an impact on attendees at GAVI Partners' Forum in Hanoi, Vietnam, when she spoke about overcoming challenges in achieving sustainable immunization financing in the DRC. Despite potential setbacks, Katumwa remains committed to advancing immunization financing as a means of achieving Millennium Development Goal 4 (MDG4).

"The powers that be in Congo are bound to afford the health sector a greater priority in the sense of developing and improving health systems," she said. "We hope to be able to do what is necessary for the DRC government to, at the very least, begin purchasing basic vaccines and honor its co-financing commitments for

new vaccines.

"This, in my view, will create the conditions for the sustainability of immunization financing in the DRC," she continued.

"The committee will exert all its influence to ensure that an adequate budget be allocated to the health sector in general, and that a specific budget line be clearly defined for vaccine co-financing in particular."

Ms. Vicky Katumwa

Ugandan parliamentarians show resolve in overcoming immunization financing challenges

Over 60 participants—including 27 members of parliament, officials from the Ministry of Health and representatives from UNICEF, PATH, and Glaxo Smith Kline—attended the first briefing of Ugandan parliamentarians on sustainable immunization financing on 15 September 2009 in Kampala.

Attendees made several key resolutions at the meeting, beginning

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Ethiopia's First Lady Hosts briefing (continued from page 2)

times from donor commitment until actual disbursement of aid funds. In addition, attendees discussed the risks of importation of infections from neighboring countries, particularly along borders to conflict prone areas. Dr. Pascal Mkanda, WHO EPI Adviser, told attendees that the number of unimmunized children in Ethiopia exceeds the total numbers of children to be immunized in most other nations. This large reservoir of unimmunized children poses a constant threat of re-infection.

Like Nigeria, Ethiopia has a highly decentralized government. Social services are financed through federal block grants or public finance transfers to nine regional development committees, which then allocate the resources across all sectors. Developing their financial management capacity, participants agreed, would make it more feasible for external partners to put their aid funds on budget, thereby reducing fiduciary demands. Directly engaging the nine regional parliaments in sustainable immunization financing advocacy activities, participants agreed, would be a step in that direction.

Ugandan parliamentarians show resolve (continued from page 3)

with a call for Ugandan budget officials to focus first on prevention rather than the treatment costs for preventable childhood illnesses.

To increase the national investment in immunization and other cost-effective preventive programs, participants agreed, the parliament needs to step up its oversight and advocacy functions. Individual parliamentarians need to gain greater insight into the programmatic operational and fiscal challenges as they scrutinize proposed health budgets.

On the issue of institutional sustainability, parliamentarians resolved to find ways to develop public trust in the existing national public financial structures, both among the Ugandan population and external collaborators. The key is to demonstrate transparency and accountability. Rather than waiting for experts to perfect the system, participants agreed, new financial management practices can be tested and implemented now, using immunization as an entry point.

Sustainable Immunization Financing: Recommended Resources

For more information on health financing, the Sustainable Immunization Financing team recommends the following resources:

- The World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and the World Bank released the "State of the World's Vaccines and Immunizations" report in October 2009. The report, which affirms the link between immunizations and reducing poverty and mortality, and achieving several Millennium Development Goals, can be viewed at: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241563864_eng.pdf
- The WHO also released an exhaustive study examining how 11 heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) have spent their debt relief funds. To learn how much funding was allocated for immunization and other forms of poverty reduction, read the full report here: http://www.who.int/immunization_financing/analyses/debt_relief/en/

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