

The Drive to Increase Resources for Children's Vaccines: Galvanizing the Members of Parliament of the DRC

Translated and reprinted with permission from:
WHO, Democratic Republic of Congo. *WHO Information Bulletin* no. 4, October 20, 2009: pp.3-4.



Dr. Matthieu Kamwa, WHO Representative, accompanied by Dr. H el ene Mambu-ma-Disu (standing behind him), Senior Program Officer, Sabin Vaccine Institute, greets the deputies and senators during the motivational meeting (photo: WHO)

On September 23, 2009, Sabin Vaccine Institute, WHO, and UNICEF organized a meeting in Kinshasa to advocate for funds for the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), galvanizing the members of Government and Parliament of the DRC.

The overriding goal of the meeting—initiated by the Sabin Vaccine Institute's Sustainable Immunization Financing Program—was to obtain a firm commitment from the Government to “fund what amounts to the purchase of vaccines, by including a sizeable credit in the budget, based on a pilot study” and to submit it to Parliament during the October 2009 budget session.

The current public health budget for the DRC is only around 3%, “which does not allow the country to meet the great health challenges, particularly during epidemics, massive displacement of the population during conflicts, or even during natural disasters,” acknowledged a public health expert. The fifteen Members of Parliament (deputies and senators)—from across the political spectrum—who attended the meeting were favorable to proposing a private bill establishing a “national Fund to promote immunizations.”

From this perspective, HE. Auguste Mopipi Mukulumanya, Public Health Minister, solemnly appealed to the deputies and senators to step up the drive with their colleagues, “to propose and vote on a health budget appropriating up to 15% of the national budget,” thus enabling the DRC to conform to the Abuja Declaration (2001). Allocating “15% of the national budget would allow the Public Health Ministry to consider a special line of credit to purchase vaccines and other tools for immunizations,” asserted HE. Mukulumanya, who also felt that “in order to guarantee a better survival rate for mothers, newborns, and children, we need to strengthen our immunization system.” The vaccines generally administered are: i) oral polio vaccine (OPV); ii) measles; iii) tetanus, pertussis, diphtheria (DPT); and iv) tuberculosis (BCG).

Some countries within the African Region and their partners have launched an initiative seeking vaccine independence in order to guarantee that vaccines remain available over the long run. According to recent UNICEF estimates for the year 2010, the DRC needs vaccines as well as the traditional tools for injecting the vaccine valued at \$4.1 million dollars (US). The DRC is expected to pay its co-financing share of nearly \$1.3 million (US), resulting in a total budget of \$5.4 million (US), not including the funds provided by the GAVI Alliance to DRC for

the introduction of new vaccines. Sabin Vaccine Institute, WHO and UNICEF feel that the “viability of the EPI to protect children depends on the financial viability of the program, which will be effective only if the State makes a substantial contribution.”

At the conclusion of the motivational meeting, the participants recommended, among other things, that



HE. Mopipi Mukulumanya greeting the members of Parliament after the opening ceremony of the motivational meeting on funding EPI (photo: WHO)

the Government: i) respect its international health commitments; ii) ask the Public Health Ministry in its forecasts to specify how much is allocated to EPI, by highlighting the share allocated to investments, operations, and payments; iii) give some urgency to release the funds set aside to pay for vaccines; iv) ask the EPI to communicate more about its activities and achievements.

As for the November 2009 deadline, the EPI (Public Health) was asked to request its 2009 budget credit by following the required procedure (commitment, settlement, authorization, and payment).

It was recommended that Parliament pay closer attention to the vote for funds to pay for vaccines and, during the parliamentary vacations, to enquire about the change in additional vaccination activities in various constituencies. Along these same lines, the health partners of the DRC were also asked to allocate at least 5% of their respective budgets to strengthen the national capabilities.

Eugène Kabambi,
Dr. Matthieu Kamwa



The Minister of Public Health, surrounded by MPs, the WHO Representative, and Sabin's Senior Program Officer, at the advocacy workshop for EPI (photo: WHO)

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