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Strengthening routine immunization in Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika provinces

First meeting of the Global Follow-up Committee for the Kinshasa Declaration on Immunization and Polio Eradication

On 18 February, on behalf of his Excellency President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, Minister of Health Dr. Eteni Longondo met with key national and international immunization partners—including PATH, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, WHO, UNICEF, Gavi, World Bank, and DIFID—to assess progress on the commitments outlined in the Kinshasa Declaration on Immunization and Polio Eradication, which makes clear immunization’s important role in achieving universal health coverage.
The six-month progress monitoring meeting was requested by the President of the Republic to be held as a follow-up to the National Forum on Immunization and Polio Eradication, which took place in July 2019 and resulted in the passing of the Kinshasa Declaration. Signed by the 26 provincial governors, the Declaration commits to making immunization one of the country’s top health priorities and describes specific actions to be taken by national and provincial governments.

Since the signing of the Declaration, great strides have been made to improve immunization systems throughout the nation, leading to advancements toward the vast majority of the agreed-upon targets. The tone of the meeting was optimistic, as the national Expanded Programme on Immunization reported that over the last six months the country has seen direct improvements to routine immunization rates in 11 of the 26 provinces.

Following the meeting with Dr. Longondo, a select group of international attendees also met with the President of the Republic for a follow-up meeting on the Kinshasa Declaration led by Christopher Elias, President of Global Development at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. During the meeting, the Head of State renewed his engagement on childhood vaccines and vowed to continue to champion immunization for the achievement of DRC’s health, economic, and social development goals and universal health coverage.

Dr. Collard Madika Kasongo Umpafu: "Vaccination is my life."
A vaccinologist by training, Dr. Collard has been working in the field of immunization in the Democratic Republic of Congo for about 20 years. First as a zone head doctor and then as a branch head doctor, he has always been at the side of the most vulnerable communities by facilitating access to vaccination services. Dr. Collard has notably developed a simple and effective method to increase vaccination coverage by relying on community relays and using tokens.

TANGANYIKA

**Improving cold chain and vaccine logistics**

The Provincial Government of Tanganyika received 47 solar-powered refrigerators and 3 solar freezers in March, as part of its partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This
endowment was made effective through PATH, VillageReach and UNICEF, partners in support of the Congolese health system and its plan to relaunch routine immunization (Mashako Plan).

The province of Tanganyika is counting on the dissemination of these cold chain materials in health centres and central offices to maintain reliable cold chains capable of filling gaps in immunization coverage to better combat polio epidemics and vaccine-preventable diseases.

From left: Provincial Minister of Health of Tanganyika, Dr Natacha Mulange Mpundu, officially receives some cold chain equipment.

Photo: BMGF/Dr. Collard

The receipt of these materials responds to the critical need for health care workers in our province to improve the quality of immunization. That is why I am calling on the conscientiousness of the nurses receiving them to make good use of them,” said Dr. Natacha Mulange Mpundu, Tanganyika Provincial Minister of Health.

Improving the cold chain and vaccine logistics is an important step that is progressively materializing the Memorandum of Understanding between the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Province of Tanganyika, signed in 2018. This partnership aims to achieve and maintain vaccine coverage above 90% in all health zones of the Province.

A few challenges remain, including the need for increasing commitment from local decision-makers. Their involvement in the implementation of activities and the adequate allocation of funds for immunization are essential.

HAUT-LOMAMI
Continuing vaccine activities during the Covid-19 pandemic
The Haut-Lomami DPS has received 25 refrigerators of the domestic type and other cold chain equipment has already been installed. Using these new resources, Haut-Lomami aims to improve provincial-wide vaccination rates which are currently around 60%. The acquisition of this cold chain equipment is predicted to help increase this rate to 70% coverage in the health areas.

As part of the continuous vaccination activities and in order to follow hygiene instructions and social distancing amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, the EPI has increased the number of vaccination sessions in health centers to limit crowds.

In addition, the DPS, via the EPI antennas and with the assistance of the consortium, carried out the 4th distribution of vaccines in 107 storage sites/FOSAs in 9 health zones in direct distribution mode.

Priorities for June 2020:

- Development of the plan for the release of funds for the next three months.
- Post-training follow-up in MLM, EPI Practice and financial management.
- Evaluation of the NGCA.
- Purchase of the second batch of cold chain equipment and the solarisation of the cold room in Kalemie;
- Advocacy for the effective disbursement of 25% of the immunization budget by the Provincial Government of Tanganyika.
First General Assembly of the Congolese Parliamentarians' Network for Immunization Support.

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