Mireille Mutuale, Advocacy & Communications Officer, Haut-Lomami Province, PATH DRC

Mireille has dedicated her career to vaccine advocacy. She collaborates with technical partners, meets with community members, and educates decision-makers on the power of vaccines. She believes that communities must understand both the importance of immunization and the role government plays in mobilizing resources. Through community sensitization and educating decision-makers, she helps to create more accountability in Haut-Lomami for immunization program implementation. Since the project began, she has seen improved financing for immunization and their supply chains as well as increased decision-maker engagement in promoting provincial immunization programs.
Provincial highlights
Building on the 2018 evaluation of routine immunization performance, PATH and partners continued to provide technical support in Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika. Technical and Advocacy officers supported the creation of annual EPI action plans, and EPI Officers strengthened capacity of EPI program management through supervision of programs in 56% of health zones in Haut-Lomami and 63% of health zones in Tanganyika.

Research is key to improving polio surveillance. The team initiated a study on the impacts of temperature sensors to understand the effects of long transport time on acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) stool samples. In alignment with the financing agreement with BMGF, Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika provinces committed to providing 25% of the financial support for immunization programs in 2019. In both provinces, budget lines for immunization were established, modalities for funding and disbursement of vaccines were created, and commitments to monitor disbursement were made.

Updates from Haut-Lomami province
Many newly-elected officials took office in 2019. Engaging with and educating these new leaders about the project was essential to continue strengthening and mobilizing funds for immunization programs. Haut-Lomami welcomed a new Provincial Governor, Professor Marcel Lenge Massangu Wa Mpoyo. PATH and BMGF presented the project to Governor Massangu Wa Mpoyo, who praised the initiative and pledged his support to the project throughout its implementation.

Thanks to advocacy and technical work by partners, Governor Massangu Wa Mpoyo partook in the second round launch of the oral polio vaccine to address cVDPV2. He joined a vaccination campaign in Nkulu Village where not only did he help distribute the oral polio vaccine, but he also committed an additional $5,000 from provincial government funding to support immunization activities.

A workshop on decentralization was held with the Provincial Governor, researchers, and Ministers of Health, Finance, and Budget to educate participants on the effects of decentralization on the health sector. As a result of this workshop, a civil society organization (CSO) platform was created for partners to share information and monitor decentralization processes affecting health, including distribution of funds and management of programs.

Parliamentarians reinforced their commitment to implement the provincial edict to mobilize resources for vaccination. The President of the Provincial Assembly stated,

“The edict has a constitutional basis and calls for the political will of decision-makers for its implantation its implementation. [This] is an opportunity for us to reflect on how to achieve the objectives so that together we unite in our efforts to implement the edict.”
Updates from Tanganyika province

The Ministers of Finance and Budget re-committed to efforts for routine immunization. In order to establish political will to support immunization programs, partners briefed and educated decision-makers on the status of immunization in Tanganyika.

In accordance with the Provincial Edict, more CSOs and citizens are providing oversight and demanding government accountability for immunization programming. An advocacy plan has been developed, and the next step is to develop a disbursement plan to ensure immunization funds are distributed.

Strengthening community-based surveillance to identify and report AFP is key to the success of the program. EPI Program Officers trained teachers in 6 of the 11 health zones to implement community-based monitoring of AFP. In Kalemi Health zone, the EPI program officer educated students about immunization cold chains. Students were trained as community relays, and play a role in assisting the EPI program to identify children who are insufficiently vaccinated.

In order to sustain immunization programs, it is critical to strengthen capacity of policymakers in mobilizing funds and raising community awareness around immunization. In a workshop, Members of Parliament learned communication techniques to use in their electoral campaigns to help their constituents better understand the importance of immunization. A Parliamentarian Network was established to push for increased and sustained political will among decision-makers.

Priorities for 2020:

- Disbursement of 25% of the provincial budget in the Provincial Health Division accounts for immunization in Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika.
- Improve transport time of stool samples for AFP cases in both provinces, using new technological solutions.
- Improve AFP monitoring indicators in Tanganyika through training and sensitization of community teacher relays.
- Improve availability of vaccines and continued strengthening of routine immunization in the two provinces.

Students in Kataki health area of the Kalemi health zone learn about immunization and the vaccine cold chain during an EPI outreach program in Tanganyika province.

Project Partners

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