Press Statement: World Immunization Week 2020: #Vaccines Work for all

27th April, 2020

The World Immunization Week is celebrated every year in the last week of April (24 – 30 April), and aims at promoting the use of vaccines to protect people of all ages against diseases. This year’s celebration is taking place at a time the whole world is battling with the novel Coronavirus pandemic that is claiming thousands of lives and destroying economies. According to the Director-General of World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Teddros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, “Vaccines are one of the most important tools for preventing outbreaks and keeping the world safe.” The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic thus, reinforces the long-standing statement that routine immunization is essential, and countries must prioritize to safeguard and improve the health and wellbeing of its citizens.

The Ghana Immunization Advocacy Initiative (IAI) Network, comprising SEND GHANA, Hope For Future Generation (HFFG) and Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Health (GCNH) intend to use the 2020 world immunization week celebration as a platform to intensify our call on government to increasingly finance from domestic sources vaccine procurement and immunization related activities. The week-long celebration is also expected to increase public debate and awareness, and sustain citizens’ interest in vaccines and immunization funding in the wake of COVID-19.

WHO’s recent immunization coverage figures in 20181, indicated that Ghana was among the 129 countries who attained coverage rate with a minimum of 90 percent of children vaccinated with DTP3. In fact, Ghana achieved an estimated national coverage of 97 percent of DTP3 coverage, with districts coverage estimated at 86 percent, indicating a highly equitable reach. Ghana also exceeded in the coverage of other vaccines such as: Measles-Containing-Vaccine first-dose -MCV1 (92%), Bacillus Calmette-Guérin -BCG (98.2%) and 3 doses of Oral Polio Vaccine - OPV-3 (97.5%). In addition to these achievements, the country’s Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) introduced three new vaccines – Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Pneumococcal vaccine (PCV) and Rotavirus. This brings Ghana’s total vaccines portfolio to 13 with Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) support.

Despite the gains made, WHO/UNICEF estimates that out the world’s 20 million children under immunized, 35,000 constituting 0.2 percent are found in Ghana. Unfortunately, domestic funding remains a defining challenge in Ghana’s...

1 https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage
2 https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage
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commitment on immunization financing. Since becoming a member of GAVI’s Learning Network for Countries in Transition (LNCT), the country has not been meeting its obligation to GAVI agreement and its contributions to Routine Immunization (RI) have been declining rather than closing the existing gaps. In 2016 and 2017, for example, Ghana defaulted by 6 percentage points, by contributing 40 percent against the expected 46 percent, and 35 percent against expected 41 percent respectively to the routine immunization expenditure. Again, in 2018, Ghana defaulted by 39 percentage point, paying only 30 percent against expected of 69 percent contribution to RI expenditure. Government of Ghana’s (GoG) contribution to RI will in the future (from 2019 to 2024) consistently lag behind the LNCT expected figures. This means the Ghana needs to strategically increase immunization funding year on year to be able to fully transition by 2027.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Health’s share of GoG projected expenditure has, over the last four years (2017 - 2020) fluctuated within a single digit band from 7.1% in 2018 to 8.3% (2019) with an average rate of 7.7%. This means that Ghana is doing just a little over half of the Abuja Declaration treaty which entreats member countries to commit a minimum of 15% of the country’s total expenditure allocation to health year by year.

We believe that for Ghana to be able to fund all immunization related costs by 2026, it will require exquisite planning by the government to provide and sustain adequate resources for the health sector, through its annual budgetary allocations, to ensure that immunization related activities including research are well funded for our children and adults alike to be protected.

As we join the rest of the world in celebrating the 2020 Immunization Week, we the members of the Ghana Immunization Advocacy Initiative (IAI) Network call on the Government of Ghana (GoG) to as a matter of priority take steps to implement these four key recommendations:

1. Demonstrate its commitment to immunization financing, as the country transition from the preparatory phase of GAVI support, and expected to enter the accelerated phase in 2022 and finally exit in 2026. Per the current state of affairs, it is evident that GoG cannot sufficiently cater for its own immunization by 2026, if the rate of funding commitment to immunization remains the same.

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2. Ensure a sustained and increased annual financing for immunization in the Ghana national budget. In this way, Ghana could flatten the downward curve in its contributions to RI and sustain gains made in immunization coverage. It is time to break the cycle of limited and untimely releases of funds for vaccines and immunization.

3. Invest in research and development, cold chain and transportation to boost vaccines development and routine immunization in deprived communities.

4. Government should also consider earmarking immunization financing just like NHIS to ensure guaranteed funding source for immunization programmes.

Signed

[Signature]

Emmanuel Ayifah, PhD
(Deputy Country Director, SEND GHANA)

For interviews, please contact:

Harriet Nuamah Agyemang, Senior Programme officer, SEND GHANA (0244982439)

Mumuni Mohammed, Northern regional programme manager, SEND GHANA (0244091148)

Gladys Damalin, IAI programme Coordinator, Hope For Future Generations (0244573219)

Bright Amissah-Nyarko, National Vice, Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Health (0201156511)

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