

GAVI High Level Meeting

Saving children's lives A call for action and resources for the GAVI Alliance

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Mr Co-Chair, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our family, we grew up with the fear of polio. Because it had struck my cousin. And as a young child, I received the miraculous drug that spared me death and disability. Today we are witnessing a 99% reduction in global polio cases since 1988 and we are near one of the greatest victories in human history: The eradication of polio. And together with WHO, Rotary International, the Gates Foundation, the US Centers for Disease Control, and many more partners, we have resolved to finish the job by 2012.

I could tell you a similar story about measles, once responsible for millions of deaths. Between 2000 and 2008, measles deaths have fallen by 78% globally and by 92% in sub-Saharan Africa.

We owe these victories to the miracle of vaccines, yes, but also to the power of partnerships.

This is the same winning principle upon which our GAVI Alliance is built: the miracle of vaccines coupled with the power of partnerships.

Partnerships that have led and lead to new miracle vaccines...

Partnerships that have shaped the market and brought costs down, so developing countries can better afford these vaccines...

Partnerships that have enabled us to reach the hardest to reach places, with the most limited health care systems and the greatest disparities in access to medical care. In fact, our immunization efforts have blazed the trail for how to provide critical health services to the most disadvantaged.

We have already made so much progress in reaching MDG 4 – and reduced the number of children who die every year from preventable causes. In the late 70s, 40,000 children under the age of five died every day. Today, this number has almost been halved – despite population growth. That's wonderful progress..But it still means that over 20,000 children (almost 1,000 every hour) died yesterday, and will today. And tomorrow. Unnecessarily.

Diarrhoea and pneumonia account for a third of all these deaths. And we have the vaccines to fight them.

If partnerships are helping us defeat polio and measles, there is no reason why they cannot help us to triumph over pneumonia, diarrhoea, and other diseases.

And when we reach children with vaccines, we can also reach them with bed nets and Vitamin A, with other lifesaving interventions, with better nutrition and sanitation.

That two weeks ago, hundreds of leaders gathered to measure our progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals demonstrates that the world has not lost sight of what we set out to accomplish a decade ago. The questions we were asking ourselves before the MDGs Summit were simple: Despite the crisis, can we move faster? How do we get more health for the dollar? And if we do these two things, can we get more dollars for health?

In an attempt to answer the first two questions relating to moving faster and getting more value for the money, UNICEF, as a member of the GAVI Alliance, commits to intensify its efforts through a number of innovations and strategic directions.

1. As you know, UNICEF procures around 3 billion doses of vaccines per year. We will continue our work to ensure that prices being paid for vaccines are fair, affordable and represent best value. This market shaping approach is a collective effort with GAVI and the Gates Foundation and we are grateful for the expertise and commitment to these shared objectives. Recent price decreases of polio vaccine and pentavalent show these efforts are having positive effects and we appreciate the responsiveness of the vaccine industry.
2. We will intensify our work with Governments and in-country partners to help strengthen supply chains so that delivery of vaccines via child-health days, campaigns and routine services is timely and effective in reaching communities.
3. UNICEF commits to working with partners on developing strategies to maximise the impact of the new vaccines. The introduction of vaccines against the leading causes of pneumonia and diarrhoea provide an opportunity to promote the other key preventive behaviours such as breast feeding and hand washing; as well as home-care and care-seeking. This has already started in Kenya, where pneumonia is the leading cause of child death.

4. In collaboration with WHO, civil society and our other partners, we will step up our efforts to work with governments and local leaders to overcome the barriers to universal immunization, to improve planning, supervision and monitoring of immunization programmes and, through engagement with local leaders and media to increase participation, sensitize communities and promote immunization.
5. We commit to intensify our advocacy with national authorities and donors to drive home the message that investing in immunization is one of the most cost-effective ways to save lives and create a stronger, more equitable world.
6. As you all know, UNICEF is an active partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and we are committed to do all we can, to achieve the goal of eradication by 2012. Not only to rid the world of the scourge of polio, but because this historical achievement will prove, in the most powerful way, that the miracle of vaccines, coupled with the power of partnership, really works.

UNICEF is placing an ever higher focus on equity, and we firmly believe that immunization is one of the most equitable interventions in public health. UNICEF is working with Canadian CIDA and other partners to ensure that health programmes focus on reaching the unreached. UNICEF is investing heavily in assisting countries in mapping out where most of the unimmunized live, and then tailoring strategies to overcome bottlenecks that affect these groups. More needs to be done to make sure all children are immunized, but at the same time, immunization also offers an opportunity. The opportunity to bring alongside immunization other interventions, new approaches, better communication. “Immunization” is and should be more than just providing a vaccine.

I started by saying that GAVI was built on marrying the miracle of vaccines with the power of partnerships. But what GAVI added to this formula is “innovation”. Innovation in governance, whereby programme and donor countries, civil society, foundations, multilaterals and the vaccine industry sit around the same table.

Innovation in financing: co-financing of vaccines, IFFIm, AMC, .. so many mechanisms to ensure the creation of a vibrant market as well as the uninterrupted availability of affordable supplies.

I have joined the Board at a time when GAVI was embarking on a major reform. Julian led the exercise with the highest degree of professionalism and, today, we have an even more cohesive and solid Alliance. For this, and for all the programme achievements that were described by their Excellencies the Ministers today, we all owe Julian our deepest gratitude.

Thank you for your attention.