

GRID3 Mapping for Health Communiqué

Kinshasa, 20 May 2021 - *For immediate release*

A roundtable on gender barriers to immunisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) brought together, in Kinshasa and online, a large number of government officials, civil society representatives, and health actors to identify multi-sectoral gender solutions needed to achieve equitable immunisation coverage.

Organised for the GRID3 Mapping for Health project in DRC by the Flowminder Foundation (in partnership with the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (PEV) and the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Children), this roundtable successfully convened health experts, members of governmental and international organisations, as well as civil society members. Representatives included the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Children; the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (PEV); the School of Public Health of the University of Kinshasa; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; Global Affairs Canada; GRID3; Sanru; UNICEF; and POSCVI-TOGO.

Following introductory remarks, a panel discussion featured experts in health, immunisation, gender, and social inclusion. Experts' presentations and discussions focused on gender and equity-based monitoring of child immunisation schedules as well as on multi-sectoral interventions and solutions to achieve equitable immunisation coverage. A question-and-answer session with the panel allowed participants to discuss their experiences, analyses, and recommendations for reducing gender barriers and defining gender-sensitive solutions for immunisation. These activities prepared participants for practical workshops, which were on the use of tools and participatory methods for implementing gender-sensitive immunisation programmes.

Observations

- Half of all children still do not receive vaccines to prevent deadly diseases.
- Vaccination campaigns allow more children to be registered.
- Geospatial mapping identifies areas with low immunisation rates.
- Women, especially young women and young mothers, can face immense barriers to accessing immunisation services.
- The strategy used by GRID3 Mapping for Health is to strengthen capacity for gender analysis and social inclusion at different levels of the health pyramid.
- There is a need to increase awareness among fathers around the need to play an active role in children's immunisation.
- One of the biggest barriers to accessing immunisation services is lack of communication and awareness.

Recommendations



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Concrete and realistic actions have been identified to promote the integration of specific and inclusive approaches to vaccination:

- Ensure high quality, inclusive services involve gender equality and social inclusion considerations to improve access to immunisation and health services.
- Strengthen providers' capacity on gender; equity and social inclusion; and ethics and deontology.
- Integrate gender equity in the education, training, and work of healthcare workers
- Improve the working conditions of community extension volunteers/workers (equipment in communication materials, means of transport, motivation, etc.).
- Intensify awareness in communities through local organisations (such as community extension volunteers, churches, opinion leaders, and the media) in order to change negative perceptions about Adverse Events Following Immunisation (Manifestations post-vaccinales indésirables (MAPI)) and inform them about the merits of immunisation.
- Involve men more in promoting the use of immunisation services, and the importance of equitably sharing roles and power with their wives (decision-making, accompanying children to care, etc.).
- Implement the necessary financial and technical means during microplanning processes and ensure that data are disaggregated by sex and age to ensure better integration of gender and equity considerations.

The integration of a gender and social inclusion approach is a key strategy to address gender and social exclusion barriers faced by users and providers of immunisation services. This approach is based on the principles of gender equity and equality, in line with the DRC's national health and gender policies.

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Notes for editors

About GRID3 Mapping for Health in DRC

GRID3 Mapping for Health in DRC is an initiative of the Congolese Ministry of Health, supported by Gavi through its INFUSE programme. This project is carried out in partnership with the Flowminder Foundation and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University. The project aims to strengthen the effectiveness and equity of immunisation interventions in the DRC by providing solutions that make use of high-resolution geospatial data. The project directly supports the DRC's Mashako Plan objective of increasing immunisation coverage in priority provinces.

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About the gender component of the project

This event is part of the gender component of the GRID3 Mapping for Health in DRC project, led by the Flowminder Foundation. The basic full immunisation coverage for children aged 12-23 months in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is 37.5 percent. This low rate can be explained by various factors, such as inequalities in access to health services, the level of education of caregivers, the low level of autonomy of



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women, as well as geographical isolation. In addition, studies show a correlation between gender inequalities and low immunisation rates. Thus, the gender component of this project aims to strengthen the gender analysis and social inclusion capacities of health workers involved in immunisation. The activities focus on seven health areas in four health zones, namely Kamonia and Banga-Lubaka in Kasai, and Bandalungwa and Maluku 1 in Kinshasa. As the DRC is among the top five African countries with the highest rates of maternal, child, and infant mortality, it is essential to implement measures that reduce barriers to immunisation and inclusive health coverage.

About Flowminder

Flowminder is a Swedish non-profit foundation with two subsidiaries in the U.K. and Switzerland, respectively. Its aim is to improve the well-being of vulnerable populations in middle- and low-income countries by using mobile operator data, geospatial data, and survey data. Flowminder provides information and capacity building services to governments, telephone operators, national and international agencies, and researchers in middle- and low-income countries for humanitarian and development purposes.

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