



World Immunization Week GAVI Civil Society Constituency Position Paper April 23, 2012

For the first time in history, the entire globe this week celebrates the power of preventive healthcare during **World Immunization Week**, beginning 21 April. The **Civil Society Constituency of the GAVI Alliance** -- a broad network of over 200 non-governmental and civil society organisations (CSOs) world-wide striving to increase access to immunization in the world's poorest countries -- would like to take this opportunity to **reinforce our collective commitment to expanding equitable access to immunization**, and to urge all partners to move forward together. **Everyone has a role to play in realizing the universal human right to health, of which immunization is a key component.**

Immunization is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions available. It is estimated that traditional vaccines alone (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and measles), prevent between two and three million deaths annually¹. However, more than **19 million children remain unimmunized every year**, 80% of whom are born in GAVI-eligible countries². We have far to go, there is still much work to be done to bring this public health best-buy to every child, woman and man in every country across the globe.

With GAVI support, many low-income countries over the past decade have worked to **strengthen health systems and to bridge the health equity gap between developed and developing countries, using vaccines as a powerful tool**. They have done this by mobilizing key partners: the Ministry of Health, WHO, UNICEF, regional and local health authorities, community health workers, volunteers and CSOs. With our long history of extending the reach of public health services, **in many countries CSOs deliver 10-60 % of immunization services**³.

An increasing number of developing countries are introducing new vaccines with the support of GAVI-- including pneumococcal and rotavirus -- which further contribute to the reduction of childhood deaths. GAVI-eligible countries rolling out pneumococcal vaccines will potentially avert more than 650,000 future deaths by 2015⁴. **With the introduction of new vaccines, the importance of CSOs as vaccine advocacy and delivery partners increases.** We work with GAVI Alliance partners and national ministries of health to ensure vaccine availability; to educate and mobilize communities; and to make certain that communities are properly informed about the benefits of routine immunization and new vaccines.

¹ http://www.who.int/immunization_monitoring/Global_Immunization_Data.pdf

² <http://www.gavialliance.org/library/publications/results-and-opportunities/results-and-opportunities/>, Page 3, Seth Berkley statement

³ A Review to Identify the Role of Civil Society Organizations In Immunization, Prepared for the GAVI Secretariat and the GAVI CS Task Team, Allan G. Bass, May 2006

⁴ <http://www.gavialliance.org/support/nvs/pneumococcal/>

During *World Immunization Week*, we would like to draw special attention to the vision and strategies presented in the **Global Vaccine Action Plan** --to be discussed and, hopefully, adopted at the 65th World Health Assembly this May-- and the **Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI)**, which has entered a new phase of intensified operations. Governments, partners and donors have declared that the persistence of polio is a **programmatically emergency for global public health** that requires the full implementation of eradication strategies and strong national oversight and accountability mechanisms for all countries with poliovirus. **Civil society in endemic and re-infected countries has a key role to play** in mobilizing communities to participate in polio immunization activities, demanding that governments provide adequate and high-quality services, and calling attention to areas where activities are not going as they should-- **insisting that countries maintain their commitments and performance.**

We would also like to call attention to the **resurgence in Measles cases** in a number of countries. Since 2010, there have been major measles outbreaks in several countries across the world. According to WHO, the **combined effects of decreased financial support and poor political commitment could lead to more than 500,000 deaths a year by 2012**, wiping out the gains that had been made over the past two decades⁵. Here too, **civil society has sounded the alarm** and has an important role to play in seeing that individual countries, and the world at large, gets back on track.

We, the **Civil Society Constituency of the GAVI Alliance**, are committed to working hand-in-hand with all immunisation and health systems strengthening stakeholders **to ensure that every child is immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases using high-quality vaccines that are appropriate for the local setting.** We firmly believe that immunisation is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing child mortality by two thirds by 2015, and to do this, equitable progress must be made. **We as civil society will help the world to reach this goal. Health is a human right and every child should have access to the full benefits of immunization.**

⁵ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=34777&Cr=measles&Cr1>