



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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The Role of the United States in Promoting Immunizations in Africa

Background

Immunization is one of the most cost-effective strategies for preventing infant and childhood morbidity and mortality, and is the cornerstone on which comprehensive child health programs can be built. The prevention of childhood diseases in foreign countries also reduces the threat to Americans resulting from imported diseases or as a result of exposure to disease during travel overseas. The successful smallpox eradication program (1967-1977) was the first significant effort by the United States to assist African countries to immunize children. The benefits of this program include elimination of the threat of imported smallpox, and savings of more than \$3 billion in the United States since 1971 in costs of smallpox vaccine and administration, surveillance, medical care, and other related costs.

The United States currently supports efforts to vaccinate African children through targeted programs of CDC and USAID. A portion of U.S. funding for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and other UN agencies also supports immunization activities in Africa. Finally, the United States provides grants to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which provide immunizations to children in Africa as part of health projects.

USAID

USAID, in cooperation with CDC, UNICEF, WHO, and Rotary International, implemented the African Child Survival Initiative in 1983 as part of the Combating Childhood Communicable Diseases (CCCD) program. Immunization activities were a major part of this initiative. Specific activities included training, collecting data, providing cold chain, sterilization, and injection equipment, developing public information and education plans, and mobilizing administrative and community support. Although the CCCD program ended in 1993, USAID continues national and sub-national child survival projects in several African countries.

USAID was also the single largest financial supporter of activities to eradicate polio in the American Region of WHO. USAID continues to play an important role in the global polio eradication initiative, and recently announced a \$20 million initiative in support of polio eradication activities in Africa and south Asia.

CDC

CDC employs the largest number of epidemiologists and other public health specialists focusing on immunizations in the world. CDC has provided technical expertise and personnel to the CCCD program in Africa since its inception. In 1991, CDC created a special activity which focuses on global polio eradication. CDC supports long-term consultants to WHO offices in Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Kenya, and Zimbabwe. CDC provides grants to WHO for

additional technical support in Africa, and provides polio vaccine, through UNICEF, for national immunization days in approximately 15 African countries. CDC funding for polio eradication in FY 96 is \$27.2 million, of which approximately \$10 million is for activities in Africa. The President's budget for FY 97 includes \$47.2 million for polio eradication, of which about 40 percent will be to support polio eradication in Africa.

CDC provides short-term consultants to assess surveillance systems, investigate outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, to develop immunization plans, assess polio laboratories, and to evaluate immunization activities. CDC also provides training in Atlanta for African virologists as part of efforts to strengthen the African polio laboratory network.

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance

The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has provided funding and expert consultants provide immunization services or respond to epidemics. OFDA provided such assistance in Angola and Zaire in 1995.

Peace Corps

Peace Corps volunteers in several African countries participate in planning, delivery, or evaluation of immunization services, usually at the community level.

UN Organizations

The United States Government, as a member of the United Nations, provides funding for several UN organizations which provide immunization services in Africa. Also, the United States occasionally provides emergency funding in response to disease outbreaks, natural disasters, and civil conflicts. The following UN organizations receive some U.S. funding for immunization activities in Africa:

UNICEF -	provides vaccine, and operational, technical, and logistical support
WHO -	provides programmatic and technical support
UNHCR -	provides vaccine, and operational and technical support for refugees

Non-governmental organizations

The United States supports the immunization activities of NGOs in a number of African countries. Funding may be sustained over several years or may be provided in response to a specific crisis. Specific activities include social mobilization, planning, logistics, management, and evaluation. CARE International, Save the Children, Rotary International, and Medicins Sans Frontieres are among NGOs receiving U.S. funding which conduct immunization activities in Africa.

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