

Country application/monitoring process in the next phase of GAVI/The Vaccine Fund

The first phase

The GAVI partners have followed specific policies for availability of country support from The Vaccine Fund. Only countries with an annual GNI/capita below \$1000 are eligible. Countries can receive a five year's supply of vaccines against hepatitis B, Hib and yellow fever, as epidemiologically appropriate. Untargeted immunization services support (ISS) is provided to strengthen immunization and health systems based on the number of additional children immunized. Safe injection material for all vaccinations are also available to countries for three years.

The GAVI Partners made a very deliberate decision to provide this support to countries through a bottom-up application process, with an independent peer-review mechanism that makes its recommendations to the GAVI Board for final decision.

Results

In less than four years the GAVI mechanism for country support has resulted in approvals for support to 70 out of the 75 eligible countries (including recommendations to this Board). The total five-year Vaccine Fund commitments to these countries amount to \$1,083 million. As of April 2004, \$284 million worth of support had been received in countries; with \$188 million for new vaccines, \$57 million in cash payments and \$39 million for injection safety support.

The rapid uptake of vaccine and other support from the Vaccine Fund can be ascribed particularly to the bottom-up application process, to the fact that all eligible countries could apply immediately and to partner support. The speed has ensured predictable and rapid responses to country requests, and the independent review has ensured that decisions are fair and based on evidence rather than on political arm-twisting.

However, the first countries that were approved for support with new vaccines will be faced with the highest prices for non-mature products at the end of their VF support period. The FTF has therefore prepared a proposal to create bridging financing for these countries (submitted separately to the Board).

Proposed mechanisms and processes for country support in the 'second phase' of GAVI / The Vaccine Fund

The support to countries approved in the first rounds will come to an end in 2005. It is therefore essential to provide early guidelines for countries for the next phase. Based on the Board decision on this paper the Working Group will develop precise guidelines to be communicated to countries and included in the handbook for country support. The overall eligibility criteria will also be reviewed and any proposed changes will be submitted to the Board.

This document assumes that investment decisions for GAVI/Vaccine Fund support to countries in phase two be taken after review of global investment cases relating to different "windows" or

investment areas prioritized by the Board. Global investment decisions will then normally be followed by a process of country applications, such as in phase one. Based on the early experiences some adjustments of the process are recommended, as described below.

Other documents now being presented to the Board propose a time-limited extension of ISS funding and exploration of 'bridge' funding for countries that have introduced select new vaccines. It is recommended that countries would not have to undergo a new country application process to qualify for these extensions but that such requests could be considered based on an enhanced progress report to be submitted in 2005.

Country application process

Considering the success of the country support process in the first phase, it appears that the same mechanism can be applied, with minor adjustments, in the second phase of GAVI/Vaccine Fund country support. The main adjustments are:

- A. to require a comprehensive multiyear plan
- B. to more clearly define the role of national ICCs in implementation and monitoring, and
- C. to strengthen monitoring and more systematically use the experiences from the monitoring process in decisions for additional support.

A. Comprehensive multiyear plans

The Executive Secretary, after consultation with the Working Group, recommends that countries apply for all the support relevant to their national priorities at one time, to avoid fragmentation. Countries will be able to choose from among options for support based on GAVI Board decisions about which resources will be available within each Vaccine Fund window.

In order to avoid fragmentation and vertical planning and budgeting, countries will be required to base their requests on comprehensive multi-year immunization plans. The new multi-year plans would need to be based on a recent coverage survey and immunization assessment (EPI review), and would include all current components of the immunization programme, any new vaccine(s) and/or immunization strategy(ies) as well as updated financial sustainability plans.

B. Role of ICC

Today the role of the ICCs varies greatly between countries. In many cases it is not obvious that ICC has played the role that was envisaged in endorsing proposals and progress reports and in its general oversight function. The political nature of ICCs and to which extent they are in a position to refuse to sign proposals or reports is also at issue.

There is a need to ensure that the ICCs play a stronger role in general oversight including endorsing proposals and reports, as well as approving changes. ICC endorsement should signal that country plans for new vaccine introduction are appropriate and ready for implementation upon approval, or in any case before disbursement/delivery of support. In line with the recommendations of the ISS study, the ICCs should also be given a more strategic role in the allocation of ISS funds. It will be essential to use the available technical expertise from WHO,

UNICEF and other partners and to coordinate the efforts of immunization advisers with the ICC work, for example through the use of ICC technical sub-groups.

Currently there are several GAVI work plan activities underway aiming at strengthening the ICCs. Knowledge and information gleaned from these activities will feed into the country application process in phase two.

C. Monitoring information to feed into new proposal reviews

At the outset, it was envisioned that supported countries should undergo a mid-term and final review. The mid-term review was cancelled. It is hereby proposed that the formal GAVI final review also be cancelled and that instead we rely more on the regular immunization assessments that countries undertake regularly as well as on coverage surveys, rather than instituting specific GAVI reviews. Such assessments and surveys are a natural basis for renewing multiyear plans and as such will be required for countries requesting support in phase two.

It will also be essential to use the information uncovered through the financial sustainability planning process to guide decisions on additional support, ie., if countries have proven unable to provide evidence for assuming costs of the new vaccines and/or injection safety material already awarded they should not be eligible for approval of additional support.

A FSP amended to include the long-term financial consequences of requested new products should also be required for phase two support.

D. Other points to consider

- In order to move the country support process at a sufficient speed two opportunities for application per year are required. This is also necessary to ensure that conditional approvals can be handled within a reasonable time.
- Many countries have experienced delays in the implementation of GAVI/VF supported activities. These delays could be either on the GAVI/VF side –drawn out review, approval and disbursement procedures- or on the country side. In the latter case it could involve administrative problems with financial management and transfers of funds in countries as well as programmatic problems related to the implementation of the immunization services and introduction of new vaccines.

Action to reduce delays for immunization services support should be based on recommendations from the ISS study. Other recommendations from the ISS study may lead to other actions or modifications of the country support processes.

Monitoring in phase two

In line with suggestions from the Independent Review Committee, the monitoring function should be strengthened to improve annual planning and reporting (further consolidation may be

possible). Feed-back from the monitoring reviews could be used as a basis for improvements, partners could be asked to provide additional technical support and RWGs could be further involved.

Recommendations

The Executive Secretary, in consultation with the Working Group, recommends that

- Phase two support to countries to be based on updated or renewed comprehensive multi-year plans;
- The experiences from the monitoring process be systematically used in decisions on phase two support including that countries have to provide evidence that they are assuming the responsibility for the long-term financing of earlier awarded support before being approved for phase two products;
- Supported countries not be required to undergo a specific GAVI five-year review as a basis for phase two support.