

Perceptions of New Vaccines in Six Countries

Research shows pneumonia recognized as a killer: new vaccines can help, but action needed to address perceived affordability concerns.

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INTRODUCTION

GAVI's PneumoADIP and The Hib Initiative are working together on mutual goals to demonstrate the value of pneumococcal and Hib vaccinations to prevent pneumonia and reach MDG4 by 2015. To further improve their joint communications and advocacy at the country level, qualitative research was undertaken by Baird's CMC. Assessing awareness and identifying perceptions among groups of country-level stakeholders enabled development of targeted messages regarding benefits of pneumococcal and Hib vaccines based on country situation and knowledge level.

OBJECTIVES

- Identify how developing countries see the role of new vaccines generally and the Hib and pneumococcal vaccines in particular, in achieving MDG4.
- Assess how developing countries perceive the disease burden for children and how they feel these diseases can best be tackled.
- Explore how decisions about the uptake of new vaccines are made and the motivation and barriers to adoption.

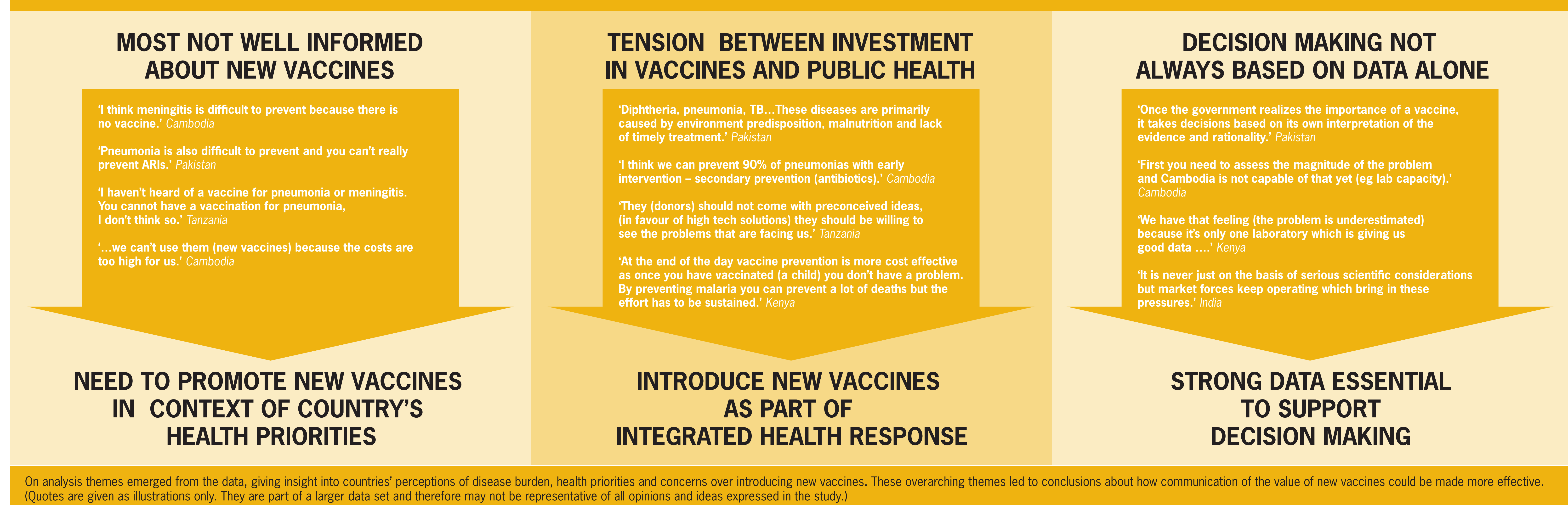
RESULTS

All respondents recognized pneumonia as one of the two leading causes of child mortality. Most attributed associated morbidity to underlying malnutrition and poor health. There was greater awareness of the disease burden of pneumonia than in 2003, this may be linked to awareness of pneumococcal vaccine, which was also greater; there was also an increased focus on Hib.

The majority of respondents supported the concept of a pneumonia vaccine, but less than half of respondents could be considered well informed about the effectiveness and affordability of Hib and pneumococcal vaccines.

- Of the 28 interviewees who expressed a view on the need for a vaccine: almost half thought the pneumococcal vaccine was needed, over a third thought the Hib vaccine was needed.
- Three quarters of interviewees did not think first of vaccines when asked how to meet the MDGs, many did not think of them until prompted. (*cont'd...*)

FIGURE 1: Pneumonia recognized as a killer – emergent themes assisted development of targeted communications for new vaccines



METHODS

In 2007 qualitative research was conducted in six countries that were selected to represent a range of health priorities, vaccination programs and some with recent experience of introducing innovative vaccines. Three African countries, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi, and three Asian countries, Cambodia, India, and Pakistan, were selected for the study.

50 in-depth interviews and several scenario planning focus groups were conducted. Interviewees were chosen from multiple sectors including health ministry, immunization program, health service providers, financing and planning ministries and donors. In each country, 6-8 in-depth interviews took place with influential stakeholders and health policy makers. A series of scenario planning focus groups were carried out with retired government health officials to help ensure candid responses. Data from the interviews and focus groups were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

This work was based on an earlier study undertaken in four countries in 2003. This allowed for making comparisons and identifying any changes in perception of disease burden and new vaccines over time.

The in-depth interviews were conducted by expert interviewers using an interview guide of open-ended questions that started broadly with national general health issues then gradually focused on child health issues and interventions. Cue cards were used to help respondents sort diseases according to burden, severity, preventability and cost.

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All respondents struggled to find a balance between changes in education, behavior and infrastructure and the potentially faster solution of new vaccines despite the 2015 deadline. Older vaccines were accepted as drivers of improved child health; there were many doubts about the impact of individual new vaccines and no mention of the potential impact of a combination of new vaccines.

Decisions about new vaccines were not perceived to be made on evidence for need and effectiveness alone, decision making was not always transparent or rational. A majority of retired respondents said political considerations or donor pressure were key factors. There were national concerns about financial sustainability and almost universal concern about the long term pricing of vaccines.

CONCLUSIONS

- There is a need to promote greater understanding of the role that new vaccines may play in achieving MDG4 by 2015.
- New vaccines will find easier acceptance if introduced as part of a package of health interventions alongside plans for low tech solutions like sanitation and improved nutrition.
- Strong data are needed to support the adoption of new vaccines – as well as support from decision makers and champions.
- These results highlight the need for dedicated communications planning and resources to address country perceptions of vaccine effectiveness and affordability.