



LEARNING BRIEF: Engaging CSOs in the EAF Process in Bangladesh



BACKGROUND

Gavi's 5.0 strategy aims to reach communities missed by previous immunization efforts, including those most marginalized by poverty, geography, and conflict. To achieve this vision, Gavi has embarked on a journey to deepen and expand context specific partnerships with a broader set of actors – notably civil society organizations (CSOs) – that possess the expertise required to reach the millions of children who are still missing out on vaccines.

It is critical to foster an enabling environment for inclusion of local CSOs in Gavi's partner ecosystem, including meaningful engagement in both national and global level Gavi processes. Meaningful engagement means having a seat at the table where decisions are made, as well as having perspectives heard and incorporated into action. These processes include Gavi's Full Portfolio Planning (FPP) process, in which countries comprehensively plan and prepare an application for the support they intend to receive from Gavi over the next five years.

While the formal process of engaging CSOs in the FPP in Bangladesh has not yet begun, a model of engagement of CSOs was used in the Equity Accelerator Funding (EAF) proposal process, ultimately approved for \$7.9M USD, with 12% of funding allocated to CSOs. The process of collaborative preparation and submission of the proposal yields a variety of learnings applicable to the future FPP process in Bangladesh and in other contexts.

KEY LEARNING THEMES

1. Preparation and organization of CSOs is key.

2. Understanding political diplomacy within health can facilitate partnership building.

3. Leverage joint support visits to problem solve together, in real time.

CSOS NEED TO BE WELL PREPARED AND ORGANIZED

CSOs are a diverse group of organizations, with a wide variety of experiences and often a shortage of resources. Ensuring they are adequately organized, prepared and represented in the process of developing and submitting funding proposals such as the standalone EAF or FPP is critical. CSOs should select a representative(s) for high-level discussions that are adept at speaking in these settings, and Gavi should support by providing CSOs with information and guidance on how to prepare for the meetings. If CSOs know what to present and how to present it (for example "with team spirit for national immunization objectives") they can gain the respect and trust of government and UN partners.

"The government does not want to see the sunset; they want to see sunrise all the time with aspirations. We need to collectively deploy creative solutions that would effectively overcome the challenges in reaching more with lifesaving vaccines but our ability to communicate challenges in a way that shows we are seeking support helps."

– Dr. Nizam Uddin Ahmed, Gavi CSO Steering Committee Vice-Chair and Lead for CSO coordination in the EAF process in Bangladesh

UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL DIPLOMACY WITHIN HEALTH

In Bangladesh, like in many countries, there is inadequate trust between CSOs and the government. Both parties need to work together to achieve the ultimate goals related to vaccination. The elections in Bangladesh in January 2024 represent an opportunity to position CSO engagement in a helpful manner for public private partnership, as the current government publicly set ambitious goals for health. CSOs used a tactical approach to explain how they can help the government achieve this political agenda through inclusion of partnership in health in their political manifesto. By owning and working towards sub-targets, CSOs make up the pieces of the puzzle and help government look good by achieving the cumulative target.



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JOINT PROBLEM SOLVING, IN REAL TIME

Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) is a mammoth undertaking in Bangladesh, there are 12 vaccines with new HPV vaccine for preventing 14 diseases. Managing this task entails intensive planning, delivery challenges, storage with specific temperature, capacity building of health workers, communication, advocacy, supervision, monitoring and more. In Bangladesh, CSOs stepped up to the challenge in many ways, including support to the government with service delivery, capacity building, joint supervision, monitoring, and advocacy.

The partners (CSOs, UN, government) put together an accountability framework that assesses progress iteratively in three-month increments, including through joint supportive visits. With these visits, the partners visit monitoring sites and assess progress in person instead of at the central level. Initially, this approach was nerve wracking for CSOs, but the rationale was if there are any issues, learning can happen collaboratively and in person to avoid confusion or miscommunication. So far, the approach has built and strengthened the partnership by framing problems as joint learning opportunities, particularly in urban areas where CSOs are engaged in immunization/EPI service delivery.

EAF PROCESS OVERVIEW

- i. **Selecting a CSO organization to lead.** The CSO consortium BACCHI (Bangladesh CSOs Coalition for Health and Immunization) nominated an organization, BRAC, to lead the process. This process has resulted in greater transparency and trust by Government/EPI HQ for partnership.
- ii. **CSO mapping** is lacking in many countries, including Bangladesh. As such, a CSO mapping was carried out by two researchers who developed a matrix of existing CSOs by capacity in each of the five key immunization strategic areas in Bangladesh: vaccination of children, demand generation, advocacy at local and national level, reporting including a digital platform, and harmonization with other vaccines and the health system. As CSOs have a wide range of capacities, it was necessary to further unfold and unpack each priority work area to truly align what could practically be done.
- iii. **Desk work** through the creation of several sub-committees – program, budget, and technical proposal writing committee. In the writing sub-committee (made up of government, WHO, UNICEF and the CSO representative, BRAC) the partners identified gap areas in vaccination work in Bangladesh by analyzing the data. PATH has coordinated the proposal writing process with partners and submitted it to Gavi by EPI HQ for final approval.

CONCLUSION

The process of developing and submitting the EAF application in Bangladesh, a practice model for the upcoming FPP process, has been a challenging but rewarding process whereby the government has allocated 12% of its EAF funding to CSOs. CSOs have proven their value add in demand generation, service delivery, coordinated partnership - as vaccine hesitancy for the newly introduced HPV vaccine has soared, demonstrated the ability and willingness to participate in on-site monitoring and learning, and proven their ability to organize themselves.

BIOGRAPHY



To learn about the CSO engagement process in Bangladesh, we interviewed **Dr. Nizam Uddin Ahmed**, Vice Chairman, Gavi CSO Steering Committee and Shastho Shurokha Foundation in Bangladesh.

Dr. Ahmed worked to facilitate CSO engagement in the EAF process in Bangladesh on behalf of Gavi, leveraging his firsthand knowledge and the Gavi mandate around CSO engagement and his role as the CSO Steering Committee Vice Chair to assist him in this challenging but rewarding task.