



LEARNING BRIEF: Engaging CSOs in the Country Dialogue FPP Process in Cameroon



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 spectrum 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 meaningful engagement of CSOs in both national and global level Gavi processes. Meaningful engagement means CSOs have a seat at the table where decisions are made, as well as that their perspectives are 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.

The FPP in-country dialogue in Cameroon began in 2022 and concluded in 2023. It featured the participation of 10 CSO representatives from the 10 regions of the country for the first time and resulted in 13% of funding allocated for CSOs – exceeding the 10% target set by Gavi's board.

KEY LEARNING THEMES

1. Identify and finance the participation of the CSOs who are working with marginalized, hard to reach, under-immunized and zero dose populations.

2. Engage the right people to organize and champion CSOs.

3. Clearly communicate the next steps after the FPP dialogue to keep the momentum of engagement and trust by CSOs

LESSONS LEARNED

Identification of and financing the participation of the right CSOs is key.

The CSOs most widely known, recognized, and financed may not be the same CSOs actively working at the local level with the hardest to reach and marginalized communities where zero dose and under immunized children live. Identifying, engaging, and financing the participation of these CSOs in the FPP process is crucial to more equitable representation and ultimately to achieving zero dose goals.

Most CSOs that operate at the grassroots level in Cameroon lack sufficient resources, especially if they operate in remote or crisis-affected areas. The lack of financing for CSOs to attend the country dialogue in Yaoundé meant only CSOs that could finance their own participation attended, leaving out smaller, grassroots and more locally based CSOs. For example, CSOs from small South-Western waterside communities – where the highest rates of under immunized children are concentrated – were unable to participate.

Engage the right people to organize and champion CSOs.

CSOs in Cameroon operate in a context where there is a strong culture of suspicion towards them¹ and are characterized by the government primarily as watchdogs and whistleblowers. The CSO consultant who helped facilitate the FPP country dialogue process previously held roles both in civil society and in government. He crafted an approach to ensure a productive and collaborative environment for the country dialogue – stressing that CSOs were participating as collaborators that complement public sector immunization service delivery by extending services to areas where the government has limited access, such as the southwest.

¹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/nasikiliza/building-effective-bridge-civil-society-organizations-cameroon>

*“We are not here as watchdogs, rather as an extended arm.”
- Dr. Mbianke Livancliff, CSCE Focal point in Cameroon*

In complicated contexts for CSO-government relations, leveraging the expertise of someone who understands both stakeholder’s perspectives and can take a diplomatic approach to preparing CSOs for and participating in the dialogue is a helpful asset. In addition, Senior Country Managers (SCMs) who understand and elevate CSOs are a key enabler to full and productive CSO engagement in the FPP process.

Lack of accountability and communication about what happens after the FPP dialogue impacts the momentum of engagement and trust by CSOs.

In Cameroon, a CSO Engagement Strategy was developed for the FPP process but there was a lack of follow-up regarding how it will be used in practice as a guiding document on how funds will be allocated to targeted CSOs. The Strategy was written to ensure the right CSOs doing the work on the ground receive funds, further, it would be helpful for CSOs to know how Gavi will work with the government to uphold the CSO Engagement Strategy going forward.

THE PROCESS FOR THE FPP IN-COUNTRY DIALOGUE IN CAMEROON

- i. Mapping.** Cameroon has an estimated 2,000 CSOs working in the immunization space, spread across a vast and diverse geography. Ensuring that these diverse groups were identified for participation and representation in the FPP country dialogue was the first task at hand. This was important because while lists of the most widely known CSOs exist, they fall short of identifying CSOs working at the local level - present and active in marginalized and hard to reach communities where under immunized and zero dose children live. CSOs were categorized by location of operation, activeness and role in the immunization space, organizational capacity, and ability to represent CSO perspectives from their region.
- ii. Nomination of CSO focal points.** Once mapping was complete, CSOs were asked to nominate a focal point from each of the ten regions to serve as a representative at the FPP planning meeting. This increased the fairness of the process and secured buy-in from CSOs including those that would not be able to participate in person.
- iii. Workshops and document preparation.** After 10 CSO regional focal points were selected, they were oriented on the FPP process through a series of workshops which were also used to solicit organized, concise feedback in preparation for the FPP country dialogue. The workshop outputs were compiled into a position paper, which was shared back with CSOs to gather feedback. In addition, the CSO focal point group developed a theory of change specific to CSO engagement highlighting their unique value add.

CONCLUSION

Cameroonian CSO engagement in the FPP country dialogue resulted in 13% funding allocation and sets a successful precedent for engaging CSOs in a similar fashion in other Gavi countries. The process offers several concrete learnings on enabling factors and areas for improvement. Ultimately, it highlights that if full participation of the right kinds of CSOs for reaching zero dose communities is desired, additional work identifying, engaging and financing the participation of these CSOs is a must.

BIOGRAPHY



Dr. Mbianke Livancliff serves as the CSCE focal point in Cameroon, facilitating CSO engagement in the country. Dr. Livancliff is a Cameroonian medical doctor who has been working in the field of immunization for seven years and has held both roles within the

government as well as in civil society.

Dr. Livancliff’s role as a CSO Steering Committee member helped him better organize CSOs as he had significant knowledge useful in connecting them to Gavi processes.