

Conversation between UNICEF (Arnold Timmer, Senior Adviser Micronutrients) and GiveWell (Elie Hassenfeld and Alexander Berger) on 10/12/2012

Summary:

GiveWell spoke with UNICEF to learn about funding opportunities in the area of Vitamin A supplementation. Our conversation focused on whether Vitamin A supplementation requires additional funding from private donors or whether local governments and existing funders are already fully funding this program. Mr. Timmer told us that countries are faced with a challenge to look at longer term options for integrating vitamin A supplementation into institutional delivery mechanisms as well as ensure more sustainable financing mechanism. In short, vitamin A supplementation needs to be mainstreamed better into national nutrition strategies. Some countries face short term funding shortfalls implementation is delayed or even may not take place at all.

Full notes:

This is a set of notes compiled by GiveWell representing the highlights of this conversation in order to give an overview of the major points made by Arnold Timmer.

Recent increased need for Vitamin A supplementation

There are countries that have had well-funded Vitamin A supplementation programs for a long time but which are in danger of not securing sustained financial support. Some reasons for this are:

1. There's been a shift in emphasis from providing health commodities and interventions (such as polio vaccination, bed nets, deworming pills) one at a time to providing health commodities and interventions as part of a comprehensive package on "Child Health Days" (CHDs). Funding and financing mechanisms vary from round to round and therefore may affect their implementation.
2. Some countries have successfully absorbed the financing of Vitamin A supplementation programs and limit the dependency on external donor funding. A large number of countries, however, still are not in the position to transition financing for Child Health Days and vitamin A supplementation into national budgets. UNICEF and partners HKI and MI, with support from CIDA, are aiming to support this transition process in key countries.
3. Some of the historical funders of Vitamin A supplementation are following a more integrated approach towards CHD and scaling up nutrition, which may affect the support required for making CHDs happen. The strategic focus is on transitioning the programs to countries' national budgets or other financing mechanisms. This timing of this process is

delicate and often not sufficient to ensure absorption into national budgets. Countries hit by unexpected crisis are often also unable to guarantee support for these important life-saving interventions.. In some cases they have not fully absorbed the fact that there's been a change and so have not mobilized the required support. As a result, implementation of CHDs are affected.

Specific countries in need

Some of the countries with a strong need for Vitamin A supplementation in 2012 funding are Madagascar, Togo and Uganda.

Other options have been explored but not found to be successful to date. Uganda has solicited UNICEF and other donors for funding several times, and this is an indication that Uganda has a strong need for 2012.

Some additional countries that may have a strong need for Vitamin A supplementation funding are Burundi, Comoros, Malawi and Rwanda.

Potential funders for Vitamin A supplementation

UNICEF does not have enough funding to address every country's need for Vitamin A supplementation funding. UNICEF follows a two pronged approach: a) work on alternative funding sources in order to secure funding for the countries in need of funding ; b) support countries to transition to longer term institutionalization and financing of CHD and vitamin A programs.

Aside from UNICEF, the other main organizations that work on funding Vitamin A supplementation is Micronutrient Initiative and Helen Keller International, which works in 13 countries in Africa and eight countries in Asia. Helen Keller does not work in the countries highlighted in the section above. MI provides support for most of the vitamin A capsules, which is a CIDA funded effort.