

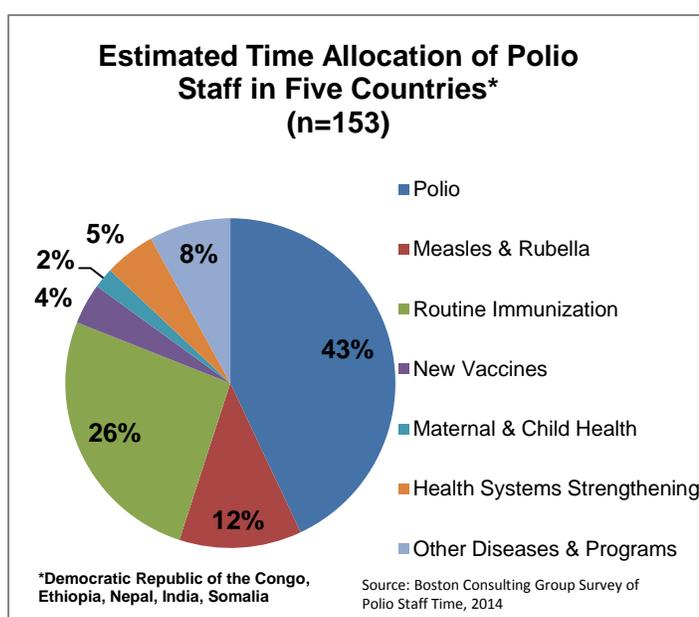
Dear Colleagues,

Strengthening immunization systems is one of the key strategies of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). Now more than ever, we need well-functioning immunization systems. This month, the Polio Oversight Board (POB) issued a [statement](#) on the importance of immunization systems in achieving polio eradication.

The Polio Endgame Strategic Plan identified ten focus countries (Afghanistan, Angola, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and South Sudan), where most of the world's under-vaccinated children live. As part of this plan, the countries developed a comprehensive annual Expanded Program on Immunization with defined actions to increase routine immunization systems in high-risk districts. The polio-funded workforce has a critical role to play in these districts. A recent survey indicated that more than half of GPEI workforce's time at the subnational level is spent working on broader immunization activities, the largest proportion being routine immunization (see adjacent figure).

Key lessons learned through polio eradication activities that are relevant to strengthening immunization systems include the importance of:

- 1) government ownership and accountability;
- 2) comprehensive planning and implementation;
- 3) strategies to reach high-risk areas;
- 4) mobilization of eligible children through community networks (defaulter tracing);
- 5) real-time data for monitoring;
- 6) evidence-based innovations; and
- 7) coordinated partnerships.



In India, where about 8.6 million children are un-vaccinated or under-vaccinated¹, the World Health Organization National Polio Surveillance Programme (NPSP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) focus on priority states and high-risk areas to support improvement of immunization service delivery and mobilizing eligible children. These efforts include development of state and district task forces for immunization, as well as real-time monitoring of over 280,000 immunization sessions in three states by community mobilizers. These individuals work through UNICEF's polio social mobilization network to help children receive all needed vaccines.

In Nigeria, polio partners designed an innovative strategy to characterize the seasonal movements of nomadic populations in the northern part of the country. Previously missed children were then prioritized for polio vaccination and other immunization services. Health camps in northern Nigeria, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by UNICEF and the state and local government authorities, also provided opportunities to offer maternal and child health services (e.g., nutrition, other vaccines, and treatment for other illnesses), along with polio vaccine.

¹ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. Annual Health Survey 3, District Level Household Survey 4, 2012-2013

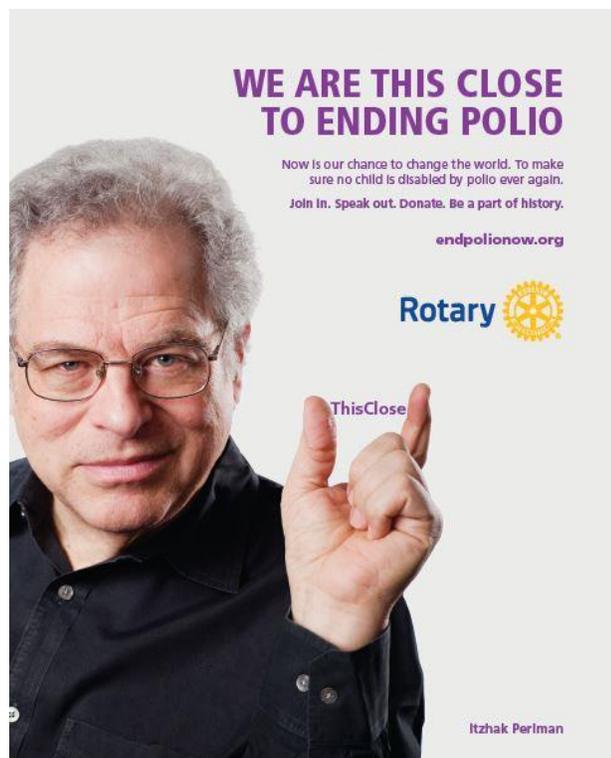
In addition, the National Stop Transmission of Polio (N-STOP) program, adapted from the original STOP Program, has provided Nigeria with an accessible, flexible, and culturally competent workforce at the front lines of public health. N-STOP includes participatory training for public health workers composed of ten modules covering poliomyelitis, vaccine management and monitoring, program management, and problem-solving practices². The Government of Nigeria and CDC partnered in the program's implementation, which has resulted in the placement of public health staff within the government structure in more than 170 communities throughout the north to strengthen local immunization teams. It has also supported training of 10,000 health workers across the 13 states to strengthen immunization systems and improve the quality of polio immunization. To date, N-STOP has engaged more than 60,000 nomadic settlements to expand vaccine provision to more than one million hard-to-reach children. The program updates local immunization plans and increases fixed post and outreach for routine immunization.

Polio is circulating in fewer and fewer areas, and the world is closer than ever to eradication. Achieving and sustaining eradication requires high-quality implementation of all immunization strategies.

Thank you for all you do to protect children's health.



Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH
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Chair, Polio Oversight Board



² Waziri, NE, Ohuabunwo, CJ, et al. Polio Eradication in Nigeria and the Role of the National Stop Transmission of Polio Program, 2012–2013. *J Infect Dis.* (2014) 210 (suppl 1): S111–S117.