

# Tracking Effective Vaccine Management indicators for continuous improvement of the immunization supply chain in Uganda

## THE BIG PICTURE

Immunization supply chains play a critical role in improving health, saving lives, and reducing child mortality. Under-resourced and poorly functioning supply chains—the network of staff, equipment, vehicles, and data needed to get vaccines safely from manufacturer to health clinics—can restrict access to vaccines and put people at risk of contracting diseases. Through the World Health Organization and UNICEF supported Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) initiative, countries are able to identify areas for supply chain improvement across nine criteria. However, the resulting EVM improvement plans require a systematic and continuous review structure if improvements are to be realized between the assessment periods.

In Uganda, PATH worked with the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) to develop a simple tracking tool to help stakeholders evaluate progress toward EVM improvements and enhance accountability on commitments made in the EVM improvement plan. By systematically tracking progress on the plan, EPI was equipped with timely information to inform related plans—the annual EPI workplan and comprehensive multi-year plan—and determine where efforts were stalling and take corrective action.

## IDENTIFYING THE POLICY CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

EVM indicators provide a global standard by which countries' supply chain performance can be evaluated. The nine indicator areas cover: (1) vaccine arrival; (2) storage temperature; (3) storage capacity; (4) buildings, equipment, and transport; (5) maintenance; (6) stock management; (7) distribution; (8) vaccine management; and (9) information systems and supportive functions. The target score for each criteria is 80 percent; it is measured at three levels of health system: national stores, district stores, and health facilities.

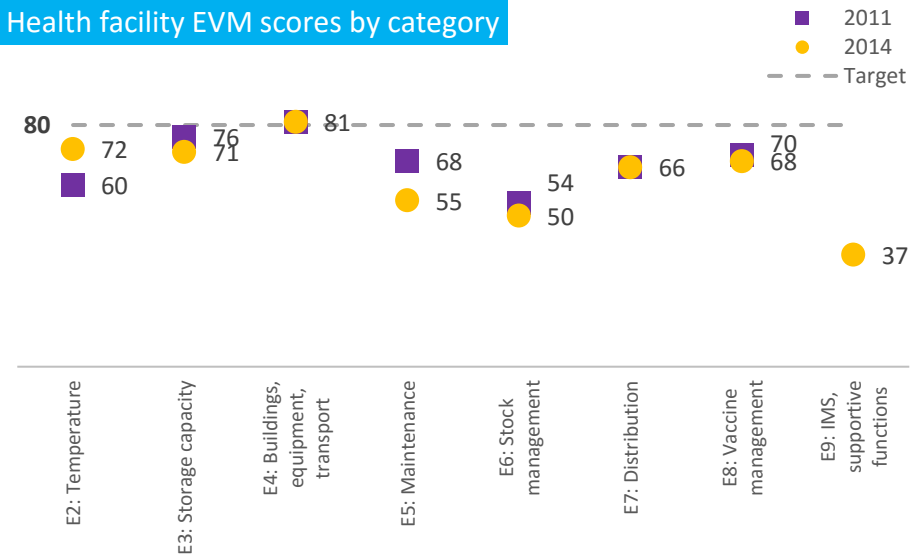
Uganda conducted its first EVM assessment in 2011, and a follow-up assessment in 2014. Surprisingly, 2014 assessment showed a decline in most of the assessed areas, especially at the district and health facility levels. This decline reflected the lack of a systematic approach to monitoring the implementation of the EVM improvement plan and taking necessary corrective action between assessment periods.



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A health worker packs vaccine vials into small vaccine carriers at a health center. Health facility EVM scores stagnated or fell in six categories between 2011 and 2014, prior to establishment of a systematic monitoring approach.

## Health facility EVM scores by category



## PATH's 10-Part Approach to Advocacy Impact

Successful policy advocacy is guided by systematic analysis and pragmatic processes. PATH's ten-part framework, outlined below, is a methodical approach to policy change that has helped over 600 individuals in more than 100 organizations in countries around the world achieve health policy change:

- Identify the advocacy issue.
- State the policy goal.
- Identify decision-makers and influencers.
- Identify the interests of the decision-makers and influencers.
- Clarify opposition and potential obstacles facing your issue.
- Define your advocacy assets and gaps.
- Identify key partners.
- State the tactics you need to reach your goal.
- Define your most powerful messages.
- Determine how you will measure success.

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Moving from policy to action following the 2011 assessment proved difficult without a system in place to continuously monitor progress toward implementation of the improvement plan.

Recognizing the need for a monitoring system, the team in Uganda envisioned a tracking tool to capture status updates, making it easier to identify:

- Changes from the last update.
- Dependencies between activities that may be causing delays.
- Funding gaps for each activity.
- Additional related actions to take after indicators are achieved.

## IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

To facilitate an objective and focused review of performance of the EVM improvement plan, PATH created an Excel-based data collection tool and dashboard to track each of the improvement plan indicators. The tool, called the EVM tracker, produces visual representations—in the form of graphs and charts—of each of the EVM activities, showing percentages completed, pending, and ongoing, to help stakeholders easily see and monitor progress.

In August, 2016, PATH shared a draft of the EVM tracker with key personnel in the Uganda National EPI program (UNEPI) and National Medical Stores (NMS) for their input. The tool was then revised to reflect those inputs and endorsed by UNEPI and NMS, who both agreed that the design and structure of the tool would be effective to monitor progress.

After finalizing the design of the tool, PATH conducted review sessions with UNEPI and NMS focal points to populate the tool and interpret the outputs.

The same Ministry of Health focal persons are now responsible for providing quarterly updates for the activities under their responsibility. Progress toward completing each activity is reviewed at the vaccine management committee, where the EVM tracker is a standing agenda item. In these meetings, each stakeholder responsible for an activity is tasked with providing justification for the levels of performance on that activity, and flagging areas requiring additional management support. This approach has increased the motivation to prioritize supply chain improvement.

Based on quarterly discussions on EVM improvement that were spurred by the tracker, a number of supply chain improvement corrective activities have been developed and incorporated into the annual EPI work-plan and later, in Uganda's CMYP. Some of these activities include:

- Establishing 14 regional EVM champions to monitor and report progress on EVM performance.
- Leveraging regional referral hospitals for cold chain equipment maintenance and management.
- Incorporating a discussion on EVM performance during various EPI forums like the cold chain technicians' training.
- Conducting an EVM self-assessment.

## ACHIEVING THE POLICY GOAL

Using the EVM Tracker, the Ministry of Health has been able to improve supply chain performance and correct areas identified as lagging in the 2014 EVM improvement plan. A number of indicators have already been improved, as reflected in the recently-concluded National Vaccine Store EVM self-assessment. The quarterly review process established accountability for performance within the administrative structures of UNEPI and NMS, motivating rapid commitments to EVM improvement. The tracker has facilitated integration of EVM improvement plan activities into the UNEPI annual work plan and leveraged existing resources—polio and measles supplemental immunization activities—to effectively integrate some supply chain improvement activities into ongoing interventions.

## FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

- **EPI ownership** of the EVM tracking process has been critical and has improved the quality of inputs to the EVM tracker.
- **Systematic tracking**—collecting inputs and creating simple, clear graphs—has allowed stakeholders to easily assess progress since the last review.
- **Routine review** through a standing agenda item at an existing EPI meeting has kept progress toward EVM goals front-of-mind for all stakeholders.
- **Collaborative planning** between UNEPI and NMS has ensured that routine EPI work aligns with the strategic goals of the EVM and has revealed synergies and efficiencies for implementing EVM activities without dedicated external funding.



PATH/Robin Biellik

A Ugandan health worker draws a vaccine from a vial during a field vaccination session. More work is needed for Uganda health facility EVM scores to reach the target level of 80%.

## LOOKING FORWARD

In Uganda, the EVM tracker will continue to be critical in the future for monitoring and improving supply chain performance indicators beyond the 2017 EVM self-assessment. As other national EPI programs conduct EVM assessments, there is a need to establish systematic monitoring and tracking for recommended improvements. The lessons learned from the Uganda EVM tracking tool can be replicated and contextualized to advance supply chain management in other countries.

References: Uganda Effective Vaccine Management Assessment Reports, 2011 and 2014.

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