

Email exchange between GiveWell and VillageReach, 6/09 (excerpted from longer exchange about evaluation materials)

Holden Karnofsky, GiveWell, 6/17/09

...We do have one unanswered question that the email below doesn't address, which pertains to vaccination data from before 2002. Charts from your evaluation report show "Children receiving DTP-3, CDG" from 2001 on; we aren't clear on how this data was collected or, given that it was available, why it wasn't used to add data points to the province comparison (Cabo Delgado vs. Niassa, which currently gives data only from 1997, 2003 and 2008).

Other than that, we will incorporate the corrections below and let you know when we have done so.

Best,
Holden

Leah Barrett, VillageReach, 6/18/09

I am going to pipe in to respond to the unanswered question. The data that we have for children receiving DTP-3 before the project is from the government system. Health workers record this data and it gets sent up and aggregated at the district, provincial, and national level. A major data limitation, however, is that we cannot use it to determine vaccination coverage rates because the denominator is not known. In fact, no routine data can produce accurate coverage rates so we must rely on surveys.

The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) was done in Mozambique in 1997 and 2003. The DHS is a USAID funded survey done in most low resource countries roughly every 5-10 years and it is often the primary source for health data in these countries (<http://www.measuredhs.com/>). Additional (non-DHS) surveys were done in 2008 in Cabo Delgado and Niassa (comparison province). As our evaluation was comparing coverage rates, that is why we were limited to 1997, 2003, and 2008.

I hope this helps.

Leah

Holden Karnofsky, GiveWell, 6/18/09

Thanks for the explanation - that clarifies the matter. Do you happen to know whether this data (# immunizations at the province level) is publicly available? We'd be interested in looking at it for years prior to 2001.

Best,
Holden

Leah Barrett, VillageReach, 6/18/09

That data is not publically available. The best I can point you to is national coverage rate trends at http://www.childinfo.org/files/mozambique_final_august_08.pdf. The DHS separates data by province and can give you more information about the 1997 rates in different provinces:

http://www.measuredhs.com/countries/country_main.cfm?ctry_id=61&c=Mozambique
Unfortunately the DHS is in Portuguese and wasn't done before 1997.

Leah

Holden Karnofsky, GiveWell, 6/23/09

OK, thanks.

I do think this data raises an interesting question about what happened in Cabo Delgado between 1997 and 2001. Unless the denominator shrank greatly between 2001-2003, the coverage in 2001 wasn't much lower than in 2003 - nowhere near as bad as in 1997. That implies big improvements between 1997 and 2001. (Some more specifics below my signature.)

I'd be very interested in seeing this data (raw # of immunizations, not coverage rate) from 1997-2001; if you have any idea how I might get it, I'd appreciate that. Otherwise we will probably note this point (while also noting that we don't have enough information for full context) in our review.

Best,
Holden

Specifics: 43,194 children were immunized in 2001, which is 85% as many as the 50,588 who were immunized in 2003. Therefore, if the denominator had stayed constant between 2001-2003, this implies that the 2001 coverage rate would have been 85% of the 2003 coverage rate from the DHS survey ... which would be around 59%. This in turn would imply that the DHS coverage rate rose from 28.9% in 1997 to ~59% in 2001 - already higher than the comparison (Niassa) province's coverage rate as of 2003 - before the VillageReach program got started.

I would guess that the denominator (# children eligible for immunization) would be more likely to have risen than fallen between 2001 and 2003; if this is the case, the 2001 coverage rate would be even higher than 59%. In fact, even if the denominator shrank 20% between 2001-2003, this would still imply a 2001 coverage rate of ~49%, still a huge improvement over 1997 that could not be attributed to VillageReach.

Leah Barrett, VillageReach, 6/23/09

You are right that a lot happened in Cabo Delgado between 1997-2001 and the coverage rates reflect that. Cabo Delgado was particularly hard hit by Mozambique's civil war from 1977-1992, which the health system in a very poor state and landmines prevented people from traveling to the facilities that did exist. In 1994, Mozambique had their first multi-party elections and major rehabilitation efforts followed. In the 1997-2001 time period, there was a lot of effort put into building new health centers in Cabo Delgado, which greatly increased access to immunization services in the province.

We can ask the Ministry of Health for the raw immunization numbers for 1997-2001 for Cabo Delgado, but if they provide it, I'm not sure if they would allow us to share it. I will ask and let you know.

Best,
Leah

Holden Karnofsky, GiveWell, 6/23/09

Thanks very much for the additional info and for looking into the extra data. Would it be OK with you if we published this exchange (as a PDF, linked from the review)? We think it would be the most efficient way to note this issue with the evaluation.

Best,
Holden

Leah Barrett, VillageReach, 6/23/09

Publishing this exchange as a pdf linked from the review is fine with us. Thanks for asking.

Best,
Leah