



Improving Vaccine Management: A Strategic Secondment to the Immunization Section of Mali's Ministry of Health and Social Development

The Health Policy Plus (HP+) project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), aims to improve the enabling environment for equitable and sustainable health services, supplies, and delivery systems. HP+ strengthens the capacity of in-country partners, organizations, and institutions to steward change and improve performance within systems. In Mali, HP+ is making notable progress toward this end through the secondment of staff to Malian government ministries. This brief describes how one seconded staff member is working to strengthen ministerial capacities to effectively manage, implement, and self-sustain improved performance in the area of vaccine management, including for COVID-19. For more detail on HP+'s approach to secondments, see [Case Study on Secondments: A Promising Approach to Government Sector Capacity Strengthening in Mali](#).

Establishing Operating Procedures for Effective Vaccine Management

Dr. Famooussa Konaté was seconded to the Ministry of Health and Social Development's (MOHSD's) Immunization Section in 2018 to strengthen staff capacity and co-develop new tools and processes to improve vaccine management, logistics, monitoring, and budgeting. Dr. Konaté began his secondment by collaborating with staff to conduct an assessment of team strengths and areas for improvement to inform his activities. As a part of the assessment process, Dr. Konaté also used the Section's 2018–2019 Effective Vaccine

Management (EVM) evaluation, a system-wide assessment required by Gavi every three years and which includes an extensive plan for health system improvement.

One significant need highlighted by the EVM evaluation was the Section's lack of documented standard operating procedures (SOPs), which should cover the nine criteria of effective vaccine management (including temperature monitoring, inventory management, distribution, and other indicators). The evaluation showed that staff lacked important knowledge on the nine criteria, which, in turn, led to poor vaccine management. For example, many frozen vaccines were discarded because very few staff knew when or how to perform shake tests on frozen vaccines to determine their viability.

Dr. Konaté built on his previous work, continuing to strengthen capacity and institutionalize new procedures through an SOP development workshop. During the workshop, he led staff in co-developing an SOP to cover the nine criteria of effective vaccine management. The documentation of these detailed procedures is already helping staff to perform their tasks quickly and correctly, saving time and human resources.

Recently, the impact of Dr. Konaté's work has been particularly evident as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. The arrival of COVID-19 vaccines in Mali in March 2021—while much anticipated and welcomed—has created substantial logistical challenges for the Immunization Section, which handles vaccine management and distribution.

Use of New Standard Operating Procedures Amid COVID-19

While the SOP still needs to be formally validated and adopted, due to the emergency nature of the current pandemic, the processes and procedures outlined are already being applied to the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. As the procedures are implemented, Dr. Konaté is monitoring how well staff employ these practices autonomously and the degree to which procedures are institutionalized.

Using this SOP, Dr. Konaté led the Section in making further vital reforms to the COVID-19 vaccine distribution process in real time. The Section now uses better organizational practices as COVID-19 vaccines are received, including strict product inspection, proper storage, timely reporting of any problems observed, and routine maintenance of detailed records.

Additionally, drivers and attendants are ensuring safe transport through routine vehicle checks, secure overnight storage, and compliance with emergency procedures when temperature alarms are triggered. Vaccine handlers and technicians are prioritizing safety by correctly using personal protective equipment. At the central level, these practices are documented in Vaccine Arrival Reports, which are signed and returned to the vaccine supplier within the stipulated 72-hour period. Moreover, various systemic improvements are anticipated in the medium- to long-term, including:

- Supply chain managers at the regional, district, and community level will better document and archive shipping and delivery information, which will strengthen the health system for future vaccination program evaluations.
- Vaccine storage managers will master preventive and curative maintenance tasks to lengthen the lifespan of cold chain equipment.
- Vaccine storage managers will use up-to-date, computerized databases for routine inventory management.

Before Dr. Konaté's support, the effective vaccine management practices detailed in the SOP were not well understood, followed, or documented. These procedures are essential to ensure that vaccines are properly managed and do not go to waste. The impact of Dr. Konaté's work is even more profound as Mali continues to navigate the complex logistical challenges accompanying COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

The impact of Dr. Konaté's efforts extends not only to COVID-19 vaccine management, but also to processes for administering routine vaccines—a critical element of a sustainable health system. By strengthening staff capacity to document best practices in areas such as inventory management, he has helped demonstrate to partners like Gavi the rigor of the Section's monitoring processes, which has reinforced Gavi's confidence in the Section and its support for the ongoing provision of routine vaccines. Staff across the Immunization Section also continue to demonstrate improved capacity to use digital monitoring tools to manage vaccine programs. Routine evaluations of the quantities of vaccines received and anticipated, available inventory, vaccine conservation temperatures, and other key indicators are essential to the effective functioning of the Section.

Dr. Konaté's work is empowering his colleagues to perform at a higher level than before. His technical assistance has driven substantial improvements in performance and remains vital as COVID-19 continues to present new challenges. Once the SOP is formally validated, it will contribute to strengthening the entire health system in Mali, as the document will be disseminated at the regional and district levels through cascading training sessions, empowering all staff who are critical to vaccine distribution to contribute to ending the COVID-19 pandemic.

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