

African immunization systems fall short, experts say

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In Africa, issues of vaccine supply, financing, and sustainability require urgent attention if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved, according to African experts writing in this week's *PLOS Medicine*.

Shingai Machingaidze, Charles Wiysonge, and Gregory Hussey from the University of Cape Town in South Africa commend [African countries](#) for their progress in immunisation programmes but infectious disease outbreaks, for example, polio and [measles](#) outbreaks, as well as high vaccine dropout rates across the region, indicate failures within the immunisation system.

The authors argue that wide inter- and intra country differences are responsible for large numbers of African children remaining unreached, unvaccinated, under-vaccinated, and still dying from vaccine-preventable diseases.

In 2010, an estimated 1.5 million children died world-wide from vaccine-preventable diseases and the authors argue that with the 2015 deadline for the [Millennium Development Goals](#) approaching, it is necessary for Africa to take stock, critically assess its position, take ownership of the regional and country-specific problems, and develop precise strategies to overcome the challenges identified.

The authors say: "We believe that in order for Africa to take advantage of the new decade of vaccines and extend the full benefits of

immunisation to its citizens by 2020 and beyond, a critical assessment is a fundamental first step."

The authors argue that immunisation systems strengthening is essential, as most are under-staffed with inadequate resources to function efficiently, but also argue that increased political will is also necessary.

The authors say: "Political and financial commitment from governments as well as coordinated national and continental evidence-informed efforts by all immunisation stakeholders are needed to both maintain current achievements and make additional progress for the Expanded Programme on Immunization in Africa."

They add: "African leaders must be held accountable for meeting agreed country targets and honouring international commitments made."

More information: Machingaidze S, Wiysonge CS, Hussey GD (2013) Strengthening the Expanded Programme on Immunization in Africa: Looking beyond 2015. PLoS Med 10(3): e1001405.

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