



BID INITIATIVE BRIEFS: RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Peer learning

The BID Initiative is grounded in the belief that better data, plus better decisions will lead to better health outcomes. It was designed in partnership with countries to enhance immunization and overall health service delivery by improving data collection, quality, and use. The BID Initiative takes a holistic approach to address immunization data challenges and strengthen evidenced-based decisions through a package of interventions including people, products, policies, and practices. These briefs summarize the approaches and interventions that the BID Initiative rolled out in partnership with the governments of Tanzania and Zambia and shares recommendations and lessons learned for others interested in improving immunization data quality and use.

BACKGROUND

Peer learning is a core objective of the BID Initiative Learning Network (BLN) and the BID Initiative's work in its demonstration countries, and can be an effective means of transferring knowledge and skills. Peer learning provides credibility, ensures buy-in for new concepts and technologies, and empowers participants.

The BID Initiative, with the goal of facilitating diffusion of knowledge and effective innovations, embedded a peer learning network within its structure to ensure that countries collaborate to identify shared problems and test shared solutions. The aim was to apply solutions to a few countries and then deploy at scale in many. This collaborative learning enables peers to design common

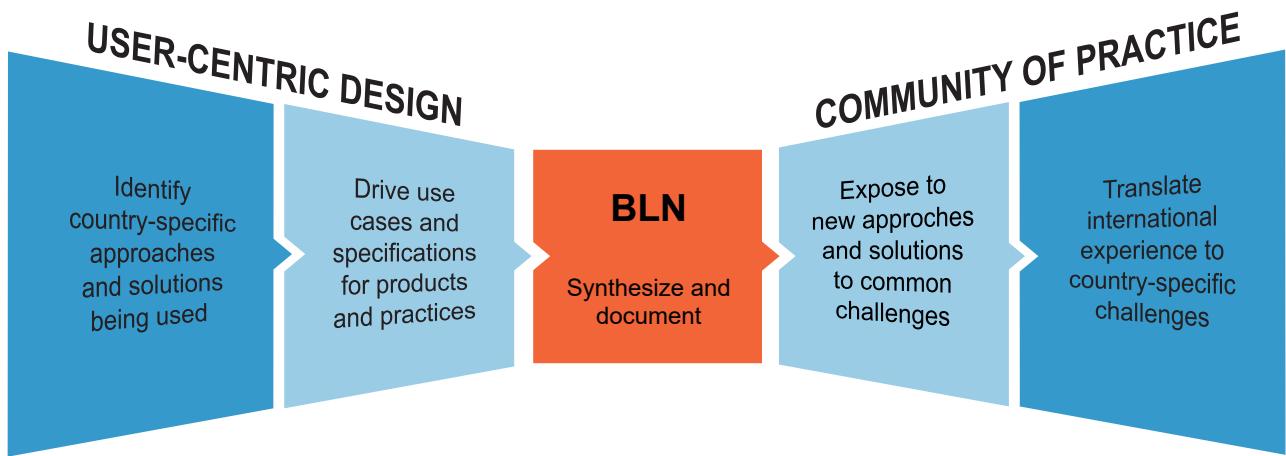
information system products, practices, and data policies; experiment with these designs; and use this experience to inform national and global decision-making.

The BLN features three tiers of country participation:

- **Demonstration countries** (Tanzania and Zambia), where the BID Initiative has focused financial and technical investment to identify, build, and scale interventions.
- **Design countries,*** which provide intellectual resources to assist with the development of data use and data quality solutions.
- **Discussion countries,** which are periodically informed on progress across the BID Initiative but do not have the bandwidth to help design solutions.

*Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, The Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

FIGURE 1: The BID Learning Network (BLN) is designed to foster continuous learning and communication.



The guiding principles of the BLN:

The BLN is intended to be a member-owned platform where participants set the agenda, actively participate, contribute ideas, and share experiences. The BLN has been shaped by the following beliefs:

- Countries are interested in helping design and test solutions to common challenges and are motivated to learn and share their country experiences with others.
- Because such a vast amount of knowledge rests in the minds of practitioners, participants in the BLN will play equal roles as teachers and learners.
- By learning from the successes and failures in other countries, and building new solutions together, countries can make faster progress than they can alone.

funding agencies, and other developmental partners to enable broader learning and information exchange. To supplement these face-to-face learning events and interactions, the BLN has hosted monthly webinars and virtual discussions. Furthermore, design countries have been eligible for small grants to experiment with potential solutions to increase data availability, quality, and use.

The peer learning network has primarily addressed challenges related to:

- Professional isolation and the lack of information exchange between countries, resulting in a lack of diffusion of state-of-the-art knowledge on how immunization information systems can be strengthened to improve service delivery.
- Anticipated challenges in ownership and acceptance of data use and data quality solutions by other countries at the point of scale-up.
- The lack of a systematic mechanism and professional linkages to harness the collective wisdom of peers addressing similar problems in similar circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON LESSONS LEARNED

Key recommendations based on lessons learned about peer learning networks are outlined below:

1. **Hold in-person meetings to maximize peer learner engagement and motivation for change.** Face-to-face meetings catalyze peer-to-peer interactions more effectively than virtual platforms and stimulate a sense of urgency for action. Multiple BLN meeting participants noted the transformational and energizing effect of in-person collaborative meetings. By contrast, participation and active engagement in virtual meetings was difficult to sustain, especially because of challenges with Internet connectivity, limited availability of time, and language barriers.

The design countries were organized into a collaborative to convene small exclusive meetings of 15 to 20 participants to share information on data systems, data use, identify problems, and brainstorm solutions. With a core principle of country ownership, the BLN's priority focal areas were determined through a series of evaluations and online surveys and then aligned to the technical goals of the BID Initiative. Subsequent design collaborative meeting agendas have revolved around electronic registries, logistic management information systems, and change management.

Each year, design countries have participated in one or two in-person collaborative meetings on topics of interest to the peers. In some cases, study visits have been conducted to enrich the peer learning experience. In addition, an inclusive annual discussion meeting has convened peers, partners,



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BLN study visits

BLN study visits are intended to enable national immunization program and digital health personnel to visit sites where success has been registered in designing and implementing solutions that have improved data access, quality, and use with a demonstrable impact of health care service delivery. One example of a learning exchange includes a recent study visit to Chile. In collaboration with the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), BLN participants traveled to Santiago, Chile, to exchange lessons on immunization registries (EIRs) and data management systems. Chile has a national-level EIR and offers a practical example of the overlap between the BID Initiative and the PAHO-led Improving Data Quality for Immunization (IDQi) project, two initiatives with the common goal of advancing data quality and use to improve vaccination coverage. The BID Initiative and PAHO recognize the value of sharing their learnings to inform and shape future data system challenges.

2. Provide small grants to participating countries to catalyze pilot implementation of promising solutions. Funding opportunities effectively motivate participating countries to try out the solutions discussed with peers. Even small grants are good stimulants for innovation. After attending several BLN meetings, participants from The Gambia, for instance, decided to pilot an electronic immunization

registry, and they were awarded a small grant to do so. After experiencing early success, The Gambia is now interested in scaling the system nationally.

3. **Effective virtual platforms, such as WhatsApp, are critical to engaging participants.** As infrastructure improves and people increasingly have capacity to access stable Internet services, virtual platforms will become increasingly important. Effective peer learning also requires a strong strategy and moderator to proactively engage participants.
4. **Organize participating countries into a formal collaborative and limit participation to 15 to 20 people who can form close bonds and communicate openly and honestly about real-world issues.** Organizing participating countries into a small, manageable collaborative helps to focus energy to learn, teach, and apply solutions and best practices. It facilitates bonding in a way that is not possible with huge meetings. Barriers break down very quickly in such an environment, and honest discussions, including constructive criticism, become possible.
5. **Limit attendance at most collaborative meetings to participating countries and encourage participants to facilitate their own meetings.** Allowing countries to meet in the absence of funding partners, who have their own set of priorities, is critical to fostering ownership of work to improve tools, services, and systems. Also, a sense of being in charge allows participants to more freely express their opinions.



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6. Encourage participating countries to lead meetings, set agendas, and choose discussion topics. Periodic hosting of open discussion meetings where countries lead but partners and other implementers participate, can be beneficial for improving country delegate understanding of approaches and procedures for accessing much needed funds from development partners. It can also help them to harness technical expertise from global experts.

7. Designate a secretariat or other formal entity to manage the operation of a peer learning network to maximize benefits for participants. Peer learning networks, even when they benefit from an advisory group, require governance. Participants have many things competing for their time, and a secretariat can help to harness different country perspectives and maximize impact, while also maintaining momentum and moderating participation.

Cover photo: PATH/Trevor Snapp

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