



Sustainability

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

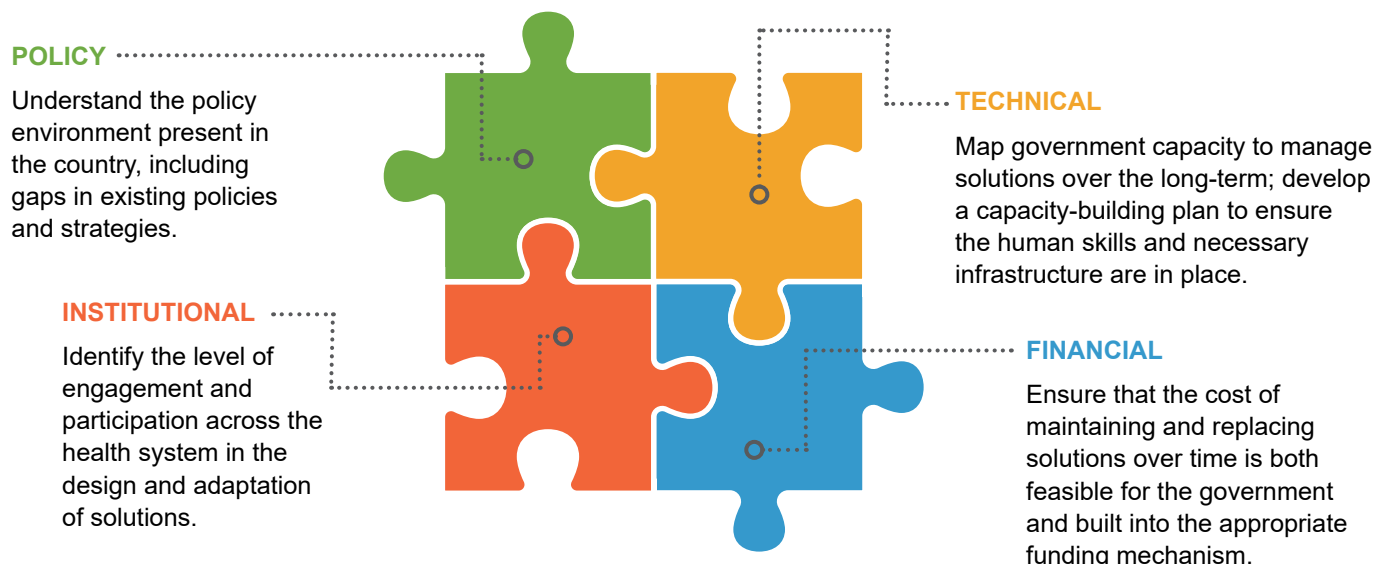
Sustainability has been a core principle of the BID Initiative from its earliest days. This principle cuts across all of the work done to develop the core products, policies, and practices needed to address key data quality and data use challenges within Tanzania and Zambia's national immunization programs.

As countries work to determine which solutions will help them strengthen their data collection, quality, and use, it is critical to plan for sustainability from the start. This begins with setting a clear vision and expectations and establishing a defined partnership with clear roles and responsibilities to achieve the desired future state.

Some tangible ways that the BID Initiative set the stage for sustainability included:

- Establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the demonstration country governments at the beginning. These MOUs outlined the guiding principles and scope of the work, as well the obligations of both parties.
- Outlining the requirements and specifications for specific solutions (especially the electronic immunization registry) early in the process. In addition, it was important to set clear expectations for what would be needed from participants and the time and resources required.
- Ensuring the alignment of solutions with existing policies, standards, strategies, or other guiding expectations from the government. It was critical to establish that solutions would not contradict set strategies or policies and would further the work and vision of the government.

FIGURE 1: There are four critical elements that need to be taken into account when planning for sustainability.



Planning for sustainability focused on four key areas: policy, institutional factors, technical issues, and financial considerations.

Policy

Work in the policy area requires a complete understanding of the existing policy environment in the country, including any gaps in policies and strategies. This includes:

- Understanding the policy context for data management, data privacy, data use, and data security. Because there are often gaps in these policy areas, a plan based on international standards should be established to ensure complete data privacy and security, and an advocacy plan should be built to help the government understand and begin to address these policy issues.
- Defining as early as possible the decision-making process required to switch from one way of doing business to another, such as adjustments to reporting processes or data collection systems (for example, switching from paper to electronic). If a defined process is not established, discussions and advocacy with decision-makers will be needed to outline a process and the information required to change it.

Institutional

The institutional area includes determining the level of engagement across the health system in the design and adaptation of solutions to meet user needs. This includes:

- Establishing a User Advisory Group (UAG) consisting of staff across the health system, including nurses, community health workers, and district and regional



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officials. Their role is to provide user input throughout the process to ensure solutions will effectively address needs and challenges.

- Understanding early the flow of data across the health system and the various linkages that solutions should maintain and strengthen. This includes the reporting structure as well as the decision-making and authority structure to establish new processes and practices.
- Designing the implementation strategy for the solutions. For the BID Initiative, this involved training and building the capacity of key district governmental staff to lead implementation at the facility level, to ensure strong ownership and ongoing support from within the health system.



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Technical

The technical area looks at the government's human and infrastructure capacity to manage the solutions in a sustainable way. This requires mapping capacity and then developing a plan to ensure the required skills and infrastructure are in place. This includes:

- Establishing skills in data management, system management, and reporting at all levels of the health system, including the ability to use the data for key decision-making.
- Building a knowledge base in system integration and interoperability to ensure digital solutions function in the larger landscape of existing systems and standards.
- Strengthening skills in mentoring and supportive supervision to ensure long-term use of solutions and their incorporation into ongoing business processes.

Financial

The financial area involves working to ensure that the cost of maintaining and replacing solutions over time is both feasible for the government and built into the appropriate funding mechanism. This includes:

- Building the knowledge base of technical people with decision-making authority around the importance of data and system management. This will create a network of champions who understand the challenges being addressed and the opportunities offered by data solutions as they look to influence budgetary and national strategy decisions to prioritize and fund selected solutions.
- Conducting a "total cost of ownership" exercise to

understand the initial investments and rollout costs, as well as ongoing maintenance and sustainability costs, to inform funding requirements going forward.

- Understanding the governmental budget process and potential funding sources and working closely with key stakeholders to incorporate the solutions into the proper budget process.
- Establishing a long-term resource mobilization plan for the solutions within the larger program context.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON LESSONS LEARNED

Several key recommendations have emerged based on lessons learned while working to ensure the sustainability of solutions in Tanzania and Zambia:

1. **Work from the beginning with a core group of stakeholders across the government and other key organizations.** This will ensure a complete understanding of the challenges to be addressed and ensure the solutions address those challenges and meet user needs.
2. **Build key champions within the government and key stakeholder groups.** These champions are essential to advocate for the adoption of solutions and long-term funding.
3. **Balance the need for a "proof of concept" (seeing it to believe it works) with the need to begin sustainability planning.** The key issues of technical capacity, policy environment, and financing need to be considered from the beginning.



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4. **Create a realistic, shared vision among partners and the government from the start.** This vision will cover what needs to be in place for sustainability (infrastructure, policy, capacity, financing) and determine how to implement process or system changes.

5. **Secure costing data as quickly as possible (including cost estimates if necessary).** This will build understanding of both the level of financing required and the savings possible in other budget areas because of greater efficiencies and smoother processes.

Cover photo: PATH/Gabe Bienczycki

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