

Sustaining health advocacy gains in Kwilu: A roadmap for change



Kwilu is a province situated in the western region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Concerned about their health and well-being, its five million inhabitants are determined to fight for better health promotion and disease prevention. Winning the battle against disease is a key strategic step for Kwilu's development, and toward achieving universal health coverage, a key priority for President Tshisekedi.



The Provincial Government of Kwilu Province, DRC. Photo: Division Provinciale de la Santé (DPS)

There are many factors posing challenges to the development of Kwilu province, including weak health infrastructure and lack of equipment, irregular payment of health worker salaries, and weak financing of epidemic response. Malaria, tuberculosis and African sleeping sickness (HAT)—of which the province is the country's primary reservoir—together with HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, and other recurring epidemics such as cholera are particularly badly financed. Additionally, lack of support for routine vaccination has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of Kwilu's population.

Addressing these challenges requires reliable, consistent financing to guarantee the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, "the question of health financing which deserves to be taken into account as an important axis for the revitalization and development of health areas in the province," said the Vice-Governor of Kwilu Province, His Excellency Félicien Kiway.

It was against this context that the advocacy for health promotion meeting took place 31 March-April 3, 2021 to explore strategies for improving health financing in the province. Participants from the provincial assembly, government, Provincial Health Division, and civil society came together to improve the health and wellbeing of Kwilu's population through perpetuating the gains of health advocacy.

Identifying the need for supporting health promotion advocacy

Integrating policy advocacy into health promotion requires cross-sectoral alliances to work together to examine needs and actions and harmonize goals. In this context, Guy Bokongo, Manager of Advocacy and Public Policy at PATH DRC set the stage for the three-day workshop.

"In the context of COVID-19, it is important to orient advocacy actions upstream, that is, toward strategic and sustainable change through the adoption of policies that can generate coherent resources for health promotion." – Guy Bokongo, Advocacy and Policy Manager, PATH



Guy Bokongo, PATH Advocacy and Policy Manager, addresses the workshop. PATH/Christelle Tunda.

Strengthening political commitment

The first day brought together political authorities of the province and the head of the Provincial Health Division.

Top of the agenda was the implementation of the edict put in place in 2020 to create a local fund to help find solutions to health issues. Divided into two working groups, the participants reflected on two main questions:

- What is needed to establish a fund for health promotion in Kwilu?
- How can we develop a plan for the implementation of the health promotion fund in Kwilu?

Partnering in political advocacy for health

The last two days of the meeting included the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs), who play an important role in building political will through advocacy. CSOs facilitate the approval of advocacy activities based on evidence from the community. They also hold political authorities accountable for the commitments they make.

"Civil society organizations are key allies in the promotion of health, their involvement in the development of the provincial edict, their dedication in disseminating awareness messages through the media and communities as well as the credibility they enjoy with the population give them a place of choice in the health system." —Dr Jean Basake, head of the DPS



Kwilu provincial authorities participate in a working group around sustaining health advocacy gains. PATH/Christelle Tunda.

Divided into groups of two, during the meeting CSOs built out engagement plans for the fight against HAT and how to reduce overall mortality rates in Kwilu.

The vice-president of the civil society consultation framework welcomed the approach of involving the communities represented by civil society achieving the health goals.

Developing an activity roadmap

Following the group work, an activity roadmap of was drawn up to enable the provincial governor to publicly write the health sector financing edict—as voted on by the Provincial Assembly—into law. It will also allow for the legal creation of a Provincial Health Promotion Fund and the appointment of staff to implement it.

This roadmap is intended to serve both as a reference for stakeholders and as a support for policy implementation. Transparency during the implementation process and publication of the results must therefore be endorsed by all actors to ensure ownership and accountability to the individuals and communities they support.

Through using advocacy to support policymakers, coalitions, and other influential individuals and groups on health priorities—especially in HAT and immunization—PATH is working tirelessly to contribute to the improvement of community health conditions throughout DRC.

PATH has consistently been a health advocacy partner of choice in Kwilu Province. Through its political advocacy strategy, PATH has supported the province in its efforts to eliminate HAT, establish a network of parliamentarians for HAT and immunization, and develop and pass the health sector funding bill. Progress strengthening Kwilu's health system must continue and these achievements must be sustained following the closure of the PATH office in the province.



PATH is a global organization that works to accelerate health equity by bringing together public institutions, businesses, social enterprises, and investors to solve the world's most pressing health challenges. With expertise in science, health, economics, technology, advocacy, and dozens of other specialties, PATH develops and scales solutions—including vaccines, drugs, devices, diagnostics, and innovative approaches to strengthening health systems worldwide.

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