Author's response to reviews

Title: Are vitamin A supplementation programmes reaching children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes? New evidence from India

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Editor-in-Chief
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Dear Editor,

Please find attached the electronic version of the article:

Are vitamin A supplementation programmes reaching children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes? New evidence from India.

By Victor M. Aguayo, Nina Badgaiyan, and Jee Rah

This manuscript is being submitted for publication to BMC Nutrition as a Research Article.

Bi-annual, preventive vitamin A supplementation (VAS) is an evidence-based child survival intervention, particularly in regions where nutritional deficiencies are widespread and underfive mortality rates remain high. Therefore, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that in settings where vitamin A deficiency (VAD) is a public health problem, children 6-59 months old be provided vitamin A supplements every ~6 months to reduce child mortality.

National VAS programmes should reach at least 80% of preschool age children twice per year to achieve the desired child survival impact. In South Asia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan report > 90% VAS coverage while India - home to the largest burden of child mortality and undernutrition worldwide – reports ~60%. Importantly, in VAS coverage has been reported to be as low as 17% among children who belong to socially excluded castes and tribes (SC/ST), indicating potentially significant inequities in service delivery for the most vulnerable children.
Since 2006, the Government of India and India’s State Governments have made a concerted effort to increase the coverage of the VAS programme – particularly among the most deprived children - by strengthening the implementation of bi-annual VAS rounds as part of the national VAS programme, managed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Therefore, the objective of our paper is to ascertain to which extent the national VAS programme is reaching the districts with a higher concentration of SC/ST children in the seven states of India with the largest burden of underfive mortality (74% of India’s underfive deaths).

The authors believe that the subject and relevance of the manuscript make it suitable for publication in your journal. The material is original research, has not been previously published and is not submitted for publication elsewhere while under consideration by BMC Nutrition. Each author has seen and approved the contents of the submitted manuscript. The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest in relation to the work described.

We are looking forward to your feedback. Please send any further communication on this submission and pre-publication process to Dr. Victor M. Aguayo at the following email address: vaguayo@unicef.org.

Sincere regards,

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