# Introduction

Since 2000, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance has helped immunise more than 500 million children, preventing 7 million deaths. Even with Gavi’s success, nearly 20% of children in the poorest countries are not vaccinated. As a result, 1.5 million children die each year from vaccine-preventable diseases. A broadened and deeper engagement with the faith-based community by Gavi will help us leverage the community’s influence with governments and communities.

# Gavi appreciates the extensive and unique reach of the faith-based community, which can be a voice of support for childhood immunisation programmes. Religious actors are strong mobilisers and serve as credible sources of information for their followers. They can create an enabling environment for policymakers, decision-makers and families regarding healthcare, including the efficacy of vaccines. The faith-based community also has the potential to influence national policy and can advocate on behalf of Gavi for stronger government support of national immunisation programmes.

# Approach

The overall objective of our proposed engagement is to mobilise the faith-based community to highlight the value of vaccines, increasing immunisation uptake, coverage and equity. The approach targets the global, regional and country levels based on four pillars of advocacy: outreach, partnership, country engagement, and information and tools. The approach also complements Gavi’s 2016-2020 strategy by focusing on increasing coverage and equity as well as providing support for countries’ Expanded Programme for Immunisation (EPI) initiatives.

1. **Building partnerships**

The focus for 2015 is to forge strong partnerships that help us identify faith leaders and interfaith councils, catalyzing their efforts to advocate for strengthened immunisation programmes. By building partnerships, we could pinpoint important moments to ask religious actors to advocate for immunisation. We will monitor opportunities for Gavi senior leadership to speak about the intersection of faith and immunisation, with a particular focus on opportunities in Gavi countries. In 2016, we may engage with new partners that have connections with major influential faith leaders and determine how we can work together while managing expectations on scope and scale.

1. **Country Engagement**

The focus of engagement with the faith-based community at the country level is two-fold. First, Gavi would strive for advocacy that leads to greater value placed on national immunisation programmes. Second, Gavi would seek ways that the local faith-based community can mobilise constituents to increase demand for immunisation, ultimately increasing coverage and equity. We suggest working closely with UNICEF at the country level, given its in-country presence and extensive experience with the faith-based community.

Gavi also will align efforts with its coverage and equity task force that now is selecting priority countries. Ensuring a role at the country level for the faith based community in this process would help leverage their skills, assets and efforts to improve immunisation services. We also will explore engaging national FBOs through existing platforms, such as the Gavi CSO project and Interagency Coordinating Committees.

The engagement plan will explore the feasibility of actors to support this work in collaboration with Gavi staff and partners, reach consensus with the faith community and agree on benchmarks, roles and timing. This could lead to a country-specific faith-based engagement strategy focused on faith-based advocacy and social mobilisation, identified key opportunities to disseminate statements from prominent faith leaders and a role for them on the Interagency Coordinating Committee and Health Systems Coordinating Committee.

1. Information and Tools

Gavi seeks to have immunisation frequently mentioned in speeches, sermons and private conversations that faith leaders deliver. This requires developing information and tools with the faith-based community. Gavi will draft a statement and key ‘asks’ of faith-based leaders and with partners seek out faith leaders who are willing to share the statement with their followers, and with regional and country leaders. The statement will focus on messaging around the value of vaccines, specifics on how to increase coverage and articulate why and how the faith-based community can help mobilise communities. In addition to the statement, Gavi will draft information that explains our approach and vested interest in engaging with the faith-based community.

# Monitoring Progress

Our experiences in 2015 will inform our priorities for 2016-2020, with clear targets agreed upon by stakeholders. As we progress, we will need to better grasp the direct causality between immunisation and faith, and discover best practices where faith engagement leads to improved immunisation coverage and equity. Ways to measure our success and manage our risk could lead us to:

* Develop a set of indicators with partners so that we can better understand and measure the direct causality of faith and immunisation
* Advocate for partners to form an informal group to review strategies and evidence regarding faith and immunisation and act as a watchdog to help manage risk
* Work closely with Gavi’s coverage and equity group, monitoring progress on faith-based engagement in-country and how it changes coverage and equity

# Summary of Gavi’s Engagement with the Faith Based Community

* Gavi has invested over 50% ($3.4 billion) of its overall disbursements ($6.8bn) in 33 OIC member states, since inception in 2000 through to October 2014, whereas the contribution from richer Islamic countries to Gavi is less than 0.3% of total funding. For the next programme period 2016-2020, 31 OIC member states are eligible for Gavi support and would require an investment of U$3.9 billion in total (vaccines support only), which is 61% of overall support.
* Pope Benedict XVI purchased the first Vaccine Bond issued by IFFIm, providing significant visibility for the launch of the facility. Since 2006, IFFIm funding has allowed Gavi to nearly double its expenditures on health programmes. In total, US$ 2.5 billion in IFFIm funding has been disbursed to Gavi to support vaccine purchase and delivery.
* Gavi Board Chair Dagfinn Høybråten is an advocate for our faith-based collaboration and is often asked to speak on faith and global health, including at the Child Call to Action Conference in Washington, D.C., in 2012; the Inter-Faith Collaboration on Global Health and Development (UNGA 2014); and in several TV and radio interviews
* Latter Day Saints Charities (LDS) has given US$ 4 million to Gavi, matched by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Its support to Gavi is both financial and in-kind. LDS has more than 250,000 volunteers to support vaccine programmes, and its global focus includes Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the DRC.
* Gavi has partnered with Muslim Aid (2011) in Pakistan for social mobilisation in support of immunisation. This work included awareness campaigns, engagement of religious leaders, coordination between health authorities and faith leaders, facilitation of vaccination campaigns in inaccessible areas and workshops for journalists who cover religion.
* The Gavi CSO constituency is a platform of more than 200 civil society organisations that support Gavi’s mission through service provision, regional to country advocates, links with communities in Gavi-eligible countries and as watchdogs. The constituency has a faith-based focal point on its steering committee.
* Initiated in 2011, the Gavi CSO Project (including FBOs) supports civil society platforms in Gavi-priority countries. Catholic Relief Services assists platforms to access Gavi Health Systems Strengthening grants and to strengthen government efforts to ensure coordination among CSOs in national planning and policy processes, focused on resolving constraints to delivering immunisation services. The project supports 23 countries; 14 CSO platforms have a seat on the Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC) or Health Sector Coordinating Committee (HSCC).
* In 2012, Gavi invited several faith-based organisations that were attending the Gavi Partners Forum in Tanzania, to share examples of their work. Among those in attendance were LDS Charities, Muslim Aid and the Interfaith Medical Association. As a result, a faith-based focal point was nominated to join the Gavi CSO constituency.
* The World Faith Development Dialogue and Gavi produced a document of faith and immunisation in 2012 that highlighted the value of engaging with the faith-based community. It focused on the next challenge in global child health: vaccinating children against pneumonia and diarrhea. The report points to three areas where faith-inspired actors can play critical roles: improved equity, overcoming barriers to immunisation in turbulent countries, and helping “connect the dots” among different public health efforts.