

The Government of Uganda began the *Child Days* initiative in 2002. Child Days are a period of accelerated action, organized during two months each year, to provide preventive health services at health facilities, regular community outreach sites, and primary schools. Health workers provide routine and catch-up immunisation and vitamin A supplementation for all children under five years and deworming for children from 1 to 14 years. Women of reproductive age are immunised against tetanus. Health workers also offer education on healthy family practices such as breastfeeding, hygiene, and malaria prevention.

The central Government provides logistical, coordination and communication support to districts who are the implementers of activities. USAID, through UPHOLD, works with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and other partners to inform and mobilize students, families, health workers and district managers through centrally-organized radio and print materials.

For the November 2004 Child Days, MOH and USAID/UPHOLD organized DJ mentions, broadcast two radio spots for children and parents on 10 radio stations that reach the 20 UPHOLD partner districts, announced the activity in all newspapers, and distributed posters and teaching materials on worm treatment and prevention. USAID/UPHOLD partnered with the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative to provide deworming tablets for all children.

In recognition of the importance of children as carriers of worms and change agents for their families and communities, and low coverage of school children in the previous Child Days, USAID/UPHOLD worked with district health and education teams to locally determine how to reach school children. Many districts successfully organized school-based deworming and other activities such as dramas and contests to educate children on worm treatment and prevention of reinfection and deworm at least 75% of all school-age children.

To gauge the success of Child Days, USAID/UPHOLD supported four teams to visit select district activities. These teams consisted of members from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education & Sports, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative, and UPHOLD. Teams documented district-specific experiences and formulated recommendations for future Child Days.

Teams observed enthusiastic participation in both schools and communities. This was confirmed during exit polls. Parents said that they became interested in Child Days after hearing announcements from their local leaders, being told by friends or neighbors and listening to the radio spots. The majority of students explained that they learned about deworming through their teachers. Everyone valued the services. Parents appreciated that services were provided relatively quick and free of charge. Many also noted the courtesy of health workers who provided the services.

All of the students interviewed said that they and their friends took the deworming medicine "readily." One student in Bundibugyo shared, "I liked everything about the exercise because the medicine takes out the worms. My friends said that they wanted to take the whole tin because of its sweetness." Some students even brought non-enrolled friends and siblings because "I wanted them to get rid of worms." Students requested that they continue to get service at their schools.

Coverage reflected the enthusiasm of parents and students. On average, districts were able to deworm 69% of all children and over **72% of school age children 6 to 14 years**, the primary carriers of worms. UPHOLD partner districts achieved higher deworming coverage than the national average of 64%. Ten

districts reached more than 75% coverage, the WHO target for public health impact for the whole community.

Deworming school-age children is an integrated activity that improves health and educational outcomes for the children themselves and for their communities. Worms are significant contributors to malnutrition and anemia; regular deworming helps to improve children's health and their ability to concentrate and participate in school. USAID through UPHOLD will continue to help strengthen district systems to reach school-age children and contribute to central mobilization efforts.