



NEARLY DONE: Grade 1 pupil, Sihle Khumalo received his measles immunisation at Boipakitsi Primary School. PICTURE: SIDDIQUE DAVIDS / GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

# Fight for disease elimination

IF YOUR perception of vaccines is something dull and bland, like aspirin and antacids in the medicine cupboard, perhaps during African Vaccination Week we should reflect on the colourfully vibrant aspects of inoculation that harbour powerful momentum for change.

In fact, the remarkable declaration in 2016 of global eradication of the second human viral strain ever intentionally eradicated, wild poliovirus serotype 2, slipped by unnoticed, overshadowed by more newsworthy viruses such as Ebola and Zika.

While remaining reservoirs of wild poliovirus type 1 frustrates the completion of the “polio end game” – the global countdown to eradication (five cases of wild polio virus for 2017 to date) is not something many of us tweet about daily, nor discuss at the dinner table.

Polio is targeted to be the second human disease ever eradicated, after smallpox, declared eradicated in 1979. While no one in Geneva has the appetite to announce the next virus for eradication efforts until all three strains of polio are well and truly gone, the likely front-runner is measles.

Measles is a leading global killer of children under 5 years. It is a viral illness spread through saliva droplets and through the air. Symptoms include fever, rash, flu-like illness and eye infection (conjunctivitis).

Complications can include blindness, brain infection (encephalitis) or death.

One person with measles can spread the disease to 18 others if they are non-immune. Young children are most at risk from complications.

Disease elimination implies interruption of a disease within a geographic area. Elimination from all countries would eventually allow global eradication. The measles elimination target set by the African region is 2020 – highly ambitious for a region beset annually by large outbreaks. It's prudent to put in context the historical numbers of deaths in the region.

The World Health Organisation estimates that prior to the 1960s, measles caused more than 2 million deaths globally per year. In certain African societies, until recent decades, infant deaths from measles were so common it was customary for parents not to name their newborn babies until after measles season had passed.

In South Africa, a large outbreak in 2009-2011 comprised more than 18 000 cases and resulted in multiple deaths.

While vaccine acceptance is high in South Africa, there is burgeoning vaccine hesitancy in certain sectors, usually among affluent, internet-savvy or religious groups. Through social media, parents are bombarded with mixed messages about parenting in general, and vaccination in particular.

What websites often fail to explain, however, is that vaccines work in two ways. Parents are largely informed concerning the first way – vaccines prevent

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disease and associated complications in the vaccinated individual. Much less discussed, however, is the second way – that vaccines prevent transmission, or spread, of the disease. If a parent chooses not to vaccinate, their child might develop a mild case of measles and recover fully.

Their child may, however, spread the disease to a newborn baby, who is too young to receive vaccine. The newborn may suffer severe consequences of disease.

The second aspect, preventing transmission, is the reason vaccines are

the most successful public health intervention.

Prevention of one case prevents infinite numbers of subsequent cases, compounding returns on investment from vaccination programmes – every case prevented allows the circulation of the pathogen to be further constrained, until such time as it is possible to eliminate it from an area completely.

Parents are not often informed about the aspects of vaccination that are shaping our modern history. Moms can celebrate

the successes brought about by generations of mothers before us – such as the eradication of smallpox entirely, elimination of polio from most of the globe, absence of neonatal tetanus in most societies, and near-elimination of diseases such as diphtheria.

These are battles hard won by the foot soldiers marching daily to vaccination clinics, but little heralded or applauded. Measles vaccines are the later vaccines in the schedule, given at 6 months and 1 year of age, and are thus a challenge for moms to remember once they are back at work. The “mom on the street” can feel a community of purpose with her counterparts across geography and through the ages when toiling to complete the vaccine schedule with an older child.

A challenge is to maintain public demand for a vaccine as the number of cases of the disease dwindles from memory. While prevalence of a disease is high and complications are part of the collective experience, demand for vaccine is high. One can imagine how high the demand in South Africa would be for a hypothetical new vaccine against HIV, for example.

Once the vaccination programme successfully controls the disease, the images of associated death and suffering dissolve from the collective memory.

Most moms in South Africa have not known friends whose children died of measles, while this was common in our grandparents' generation.

Similarly, our grandparents remember the fear of paralysed children due to polio, or children who suddenly suffocated because of the swelling of the throat caused by diphtheria.

As a disease becomes less common however, vigilance for the disease needs to be heightened and urgency of response strengthened. In 2014, for example, export of polio from long term reservoirs to previously uninfected countries resulted in a public health emergency of international concern, the same status accorded to the Ebola outbreak three months later.

Considering we have had a safe, inexpensive vaccine against measles since the 1970s, the figure of more than 130 000 deaths globally from measles in 2015 is an appalling statistic. While 2020 is likely an unrealistic timeline for measles elimination in the African region, setting the target allows pressure and impetus to build in the correct direction.

During African Vaccination week, we celebrate the spirit of global co-operation towards the common purpose of stopping measles transmission and preventable measles deaths, in South Africa and beyond. To this end, we specifically acknowledge the effort made by South African mothers for the critical role they play in the fight for measles elimination.

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# Let's break barriers to bolster black business

MASHUDU RAMANO

OVER the past 24 years of democracy, a particular spirit has come to dominate the narrative, the story of how business is done in South Africa. The Zeitgeist is engrained in how we do business. It could be described as the 26% spirit, or what is more popularly known as BEE in the world of business and politics.

It is not uncommon for black people involved in business to be described as BEE. Black people have embraced this identity.

We should be asking why only 26%. Why couldn't black people acquire more available entities and become majority shareholders if they can afford to do so and have the skills? Why should they participate in deals where their only value is to bring government licences and public sector businesses?

The time has come for South Africa, its policy makers and regulators and black entrepreneurs to rise to the occasion and break free of the shackles of

the BEE policy framework and demand a change. It is time South Africa facilitated the establishment of black majority-owned companies in defined sectors when the opportunity arises.

Many such opportunities have become available. The liquid fuels, gas and energy markets have presented many favourable situations to break the 26% mould. These include the aborted sale of Engen by Petronas. There have also been rumours that Shell and BP are going to follow their divestment strategy on the continent and sell their South African downstream assets.

These represent ideal opportunities for black controlling shareholders to emerge at the helm of these businesses. The recently announced deal by Chevron Global Energy, in which it has agreed to sell its majority 75% stake in Chevron South Africa to Sinopec, China's largest player in the oil and gas markets, appears to be another missed opportunity. These potential transactions present historic moments which South Africa should use to advance the cause of indigenising a

critical part of its economy.

A brief analysis of the energy and liquid fuels market will show that the industry plays a significant role in the economy. The top six companies – BP, Chevron, Engen, Shell, Total and Sasol – account for about 5% of the gross domestic product or about R450 billion. In 2010, in a paper titled “The South African Liquid Fuel Market”, Cornelius Jacobus Swart noted three key phases in the industry.

The first was pre-1954 when South Africa imported all its petroleum products and had no refining capacity.

The second was post-1954 when Sasol was established and key refineries were set up by the global majors. Sasol's development was driven more by the apartheid government's resolve to create indigenous capacity and the need to reduce reliance on international oil companies rather than any commercial logic.

The final was what can be described

as post-Liquid Fuels Charter when the paradigm of the 26% and the triple BEE era dominated. Even though the liquid fuels industry became the first to adopt a transformation charter and committed itself to having at least 26% black ownership within 10 years, sadly, 17 years have passed and the 26% black ownership has yet to be realised.

The preamble to the charter is full of noble ideas such as “the imperatives of redressing historical social and economic inequalities”. However, despite the policy objective stated in the Energy Policy White Paper to achieve “Sustainable presence, ownership or control by historically disadvantaged South Africans”, much remains undone.

The post-1954 era produced Sasol. What will the post-1994 period produce? No major successful national, black majority-owned and managed company has emerged in the industry. It is the

same in many other sectors.

South Africa cannot afford to have a major part of its energy sector existing without significant black participation. The exit of these companies from South Africa should be used to create national private-sector champions and black majority-owned and managed companies. Here is a huge opportunity to create such companies.

It is a chance for the government to fulfil one of the major aspirations of the Freedom Charter – that black people own the commanding heights of the economy – and for the government to live up to its recently promulgated goal of creating more black industrialists.

There have been similar moments before, such as the sale of Anglo American's industrial assets to a group comprising black business and trade unions in 1996. This sale resulted in the creation of Johnnic Industrial Holdings – a conglomerate of assets that spanned many sectors, from property and pharmaceuticals to media and entertainment, and also the mighty SAB, recently bought

by AB InBev, the world's largest brewer. Johnnic Industrial Holdings – controlled by a group of black business and trade unions – had joint control of SAB, together with Liberty Life.

Is this a rejection of international investments in South Africa? Not at all.

This period of majority black rule is a historic moment which calls for bold and courageous actions.

We need to seize the moment and do the right thing. South Africa should continue to welcome direct foreign investment, but it should also encourage the participation of its own people, not as minority shareholders who are perpetually at the mercy of majority shareholders, but as majority and controlling shareholders.

Other countries do it and this is the moment when South Africa should begin to do so as well.

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