

India ready to share Co-WIN experience with other nations including in Africa: Dr Sharma

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India is ready to share with other countries, especially those in Africa and the Global South, its experience and expertise regarding the COVID-19 vaccination programme rollout with the help of the digital platform called Co-WIN, Dr R. S. Sharma, CEO, National Health Authority, said on Wednesday. Significantly, Dr Sharma also said privacy protection and prevention of cyberattacks were given utmost importance while developing the national portal and when it was decided to make available Co-WIN Public APIs (for appointments and vaccine certificate downloads) for use by third party applications.

Speaking at a webinar organised by the New Delhi-based research institute RIS on 19 May 2021 on 'Coping with COVID: experiences of developing countries in vaccine platforms and rollout', Dr Sharma said India's rich experience of vaccinating its huge population and the challenges faced by the system - on account of the country's diversity in terms of multiple languages and dialects, as well as people who are educated, functionally illiterate, old and young, those 'with and without' adequate knowledge and information about the vaccine, and the rural and urban areas - could be shared with other countries, especially from the developing world.

He said Nigeria had requested India to share the Co-WIN platform and support the setting up of such a platform in that country, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already approved any such cooperation in jointly fighting COVID. "The Prime Minister has said India must help any country that asks for our help. India helped other countries with vaccinations, medicines and other support. We are ready to help any country from Africa or any other part of the world, that wants our help," Dr Sharma said.

Countries including Morocco, and those in South East Asia such as the Philippines were keen on getting India's help regarding developing a digital ID programme similar to Aadhaar, he said. "We are absolutely open to sharing this experience with any country," he said.

Terming the issue of guarding the Co-WIN platform from cyberattacks as "very important", he said the government has adopted the principle of minimal data collection. Only a person's name, gender and year of birth and the personal identity document are required for registration on the platform, he said, adding that these are not very sensitive private data. "We don't have as such any sensitive private data. We have a robust system of encryption of that data. We also have provided all the necessary tools and are taking all precautions to ensure that we are not subjected to cyberattacks or become victim to such attacks," he said.

On the scalability of the system, he said the Co-WIN platform was opened the registration for people aged 18-45 on April 28 at 4 pm, and till midnight of that day there were 13.7 million registrations on the platform. "We were clocking 55,000 concurrent users per second on the platform. So, the scale that the platform was able to sustain is also very important (to note)," he said.

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS, said the rise of ‘ABCD’ (Artificial intelligence, Blockchain, Cloud computing and Data analysis) was influencing and facilitating access to technology. “India’s efforts have in a way created new platforms for sharing vaccines for their equitable distribution and facilitating access, equity and inclusion with this framework,” he said.

Ambassador Amar Sinha, Chairman, Advisory Committee-GDC and Distinguished Fellow, RIS, pointed out that representatives from four important African countries – Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda – participated in the webinar to share their experiences and challenges relating to their vaccine programmes. He said like in the case of water where every drop is precious, regarding vaccines too every dose/job is important to ensure that everyone gets access to stay healthy and safe.

Dr Sandeep Bhalla, Associate Vice President-Projects, ECHO India moderated the discussion. Experts who spoke on the occasion included Mr Hassan Sibomana, Director, Vaccination Unit, Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), Dr Abdullahi Bulama Garba, Director (Planning, Research and Statistics), National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), Nigeria and Dr Rose Jalang’o, Strategic Information Management and Communications Officer, National Vaccines and Immunization Program (NVIP), Kenya.

The issues that were on the table for discussion during the webinar included how South-South Cooperation can inspire developing countries to help each other in co-creating digital platforms needed for vaccine management, the challenges faced in supply chain management and training for vaccine production and distribution, how developing countries can overcome vaccination hesitancy, the mechanism that can be developed to share learning amongst developing countries, vis-à-vis handling of COVID-19 and how South-South Cooperation can help in rapid vaccination in developing countries. (ENDS)

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