UK chancellor announces new type of fund to provide \$4bn vaccine aid

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

Gordon Brown, the United Kingdom's chancellor of the exchequer, launched a unique funding initiative last week that will provide an extra \$4bn (£2.2bn; €3.3bn) to step up immunisation programmes in developing countries over the next 10 years. The initiative should save an estimated five million children's lives.

Mr Brown has been lobbying for support for the plan, which is called the international finance facility for immunisation, since he came up with the idea in January 2003. He described the scheme as a "breakthrough" in aid that will release new funds

for extra vaccines in more than 70 of the world's poorest countries "almost immediately."

The new finance facility, which is supported by contributions from the UK, France, Spain, Italy, Sweden, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is the first pilot in what Mr Brown hopes will become a standard method of securing backing for long term development projects. It raises funds by borrowing money on the international bonds market against commitments of future aid.

The \$4bn which has been promised for the next 10 years

will go to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation to boost its delivery of combination vaccines for diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B, and *Haemophilus influenzae* type B, as well as mass immunisations against measles and tetanus. "Blanket rather than partial immunisation will be available," said Mr Brown. Funding vaccine programmes in this way will also help to further reduce the prices of vaccines and encourage the development of new vaccines against diseases such as HIV and malaria through advance purchase schemes, he said.

Every year two to three million of the 10 million children who die before they reach the age of 5 die from diseases that can be prevented by vaccines. The global alliance, which was established in 2000 to increase

immunisation rates in developing countries, estimates that the new funds will help to prevent the deaths of more than five million children from preventable diseases over the next 10 years.

The largest share of the fund comes from the UK, which has pledged \$130m a year over 10 years, or 35% of the total. France has promised \$100m a year (25%), Italy \$30m (10%), and Spain \$12m (3%). Sweden has put in a one-off contribution of \$27m. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation pledged \$750m over 10 years.

Julian Lob-Levyt, executive secretary of the global alliance, said: "Substantial funding to support health systems is needed if countries are going to expand access to the traditional vaccines and manage and deliver new vaccines."

Goals to reduce poverty and infant mortality will be missed

Owen Dyer *London*

Published on the eve of the United Nations summit in New York this week, the UN's 2005 *Human Development Report* finds that progress on human development, public health, and education is slowing or stagnating in many parts of the world.

The report predicts that the UN's millennium development goals—a commitment made by 189 nations to reduce infant mortality and extreme poverty and to improve maternal health, primary education, and sex equality—are in many cases further from realisation today than they were in 1990.

"Almost all of the goals will be missed by most countries, some of them by epic margins," the UN concludes, if the world continues on a "business-as-usual basis" between now and 2015, the date set for the goals' achievement.

Inequality is growing faster than ever, the report finds, within states as well as between them. "Most developing regions are falling behind, not catching up with, rich countries," the authors say. "The human devel-

opment benefits of economic success have been slow to trickle down to large sections of the population—and the trickle appears to be slowing in some key areas of public health."

India and China are singled out as two countries with booming economies that have failed to produce commensurate improvements in social development. Progress on child mortality in these countries has slowed even as the economy has gathered steam, the UN says. Yet their vastly poorer neighbours, Vietnam and Bangladesh, have made great strides over the same period, proving the value of government intervention.

As in previous years the annual report predicts that if current trends continue the world's failure to meet the goal on infant mortality will result in an extra 41 million children dying between now and 2015.

On current trends, the report predicts, the world will not meet the goal of reducing child mortality by two thirds until 2045—30 years late. As for the goal of achieving universal primary education, 46 countries are currently going backwards or will not meet the target until after 2040, it says. The authors estimate that the income of the world's 500 richest people listed by *Forbes* magazine is equal to that of the world's poorest 416 million people.

Last month John Bolton, the United States' ambassador to the

United Nations, called into question the very existence of the millennium development goals, when he presented a long list of objections to a draft document that is due to be presented at this week's UN summit.

Mr Bolton denied that the US had ever signed up to the goals, although President Bush has endorsed both the 2000 millennium declaration, which included the goals, and the Monterrey consensus, an agreement that urged wealthy countries to

"make concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7% of gross national product" in foreign assistance.

Mr Bolton eventually accepted the reference to the goals in the summit document, but as the *BMJ* went to press he was still rejecting the annex setting the 0.7% aid target, and prospects for agreement looked far from certain.

Human Development Report 2005 is available at www.undp.org.