
CHAIRS' STATEMENT
High Level Meeting of the Global Polio Partners Group (PPG)
Monday, 4 November 2013

On 4 November 2013, a high-level meeting of the Polio Partners Group of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) met in Geneva at the World Health Organization headquarters. Discussion focused on the continuing efforts to eliminate polio in the three endemic countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria, and on the emergency response to the outbreaks in the Horn of Africa, Syria, and elsewhere. Attention was also devoted to reports from the GPEI Polio Oversight Board and Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) and to the 2013-2018 Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan, including how best to improve existing reporting and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, the widespread introduction of the Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV), and GPEI legacy planning.

During the meeting, PPG stakeholders:

- Acknowledged the further progress achieved to date towards a polio free world, noting in particular the attainment of some important milestones for the global program such as the realization of one year free of type 3 wild polio virus globally, and the decline in endemic cases with particular successes in southern Afghanistan.
- Expressed appreciation for the efforts of hundreds of thousands of individuals who continue to work to reduce the prevalence of polio, increasingly in some contexts at great risks to their own lives. PPG members agreed they would explore means by which the contribution by such front line workers can be better highlighted.
- Underscored the importance of capitalizing on the upcoming annual “low season” for polio transmission to effectively leverage recent progress and interrupt transmission in endemic countries. In this regard, the PPG stressed the need in particular to foster more sophisticated micro-analysis and social mobilization strategies as a means of overcoming insecurity and political resistance, thereby increasing access to hard-to-reach populations. Several approaches were identified for consideration including:
 - More effectively tying polio with routine immunization and/or other community-based activities, and potentially reducing the profile of polio while in concert with other efforts
 - Better engaging key local and regional opinion leaders and Islamic scholars including to develop and deliver messages that can encourage cooperation with polio campaigns and counter negative commentary on them
 - Drawing on diplomatic and other expertise that may be required
 - Ensuring the necessary close alignment between senior level commitments in endemic countries and activities being pursued at district levels
- Expressed concern at recent outbreaks -- including in the Horn of Africa and Syria -- noting they are a reminder of the challenges that remain and of the risk that circulation of wild polio virus in endemic countries poses to the rest of the world. In welcoming the latest IMB report,

the PPG called on the GPEI to greatly improve its response to the current outbreaks, and enhance its approach to the prevention and management of future outbreaks in order to protect at risk countries from reinfection. Several strategies were identified in this regard, including ensuring that UNICEF and WHO have the right people in the right places and in a manner consistent with polio being declared a programmatic emergency by the World Health Assembly and accelerating the adoption of best practices learned from polio eradication to close immunity gaps in polio-free countries.

- Stressed the need to ensure that, more broadly, the GPEI is adequately equipped to tackle the challenges identified in the 8th report of the IMB – namely, security challenges, targeted violence and access bans, which constitute major impediments to reaching the goal of stopping transmission of wild polio virus.
- Recalled the financial pledges made at the Global Vaccine Summit in Abu Dhabi, and urged that these be fulfilled without delay in order to avoid compromising the efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes. The need for additional contributions to GPEI was also underscored in order to close the funding gap for 2013-2018, and as above, it was stressed that any projected future commitments be timely and provided in as flexible a manner as possible. It was noted that positive news stories about contributions would be welcome, including pointing to innovative initiatives such as co-financing.
- Reiterated the importance of the work on GPEI legacy planning and recommended that it be provided the necessary attention even as GPEI focuses on other pressing matters. PPG members committed to provide input to the questions posed by the Legacy Working Group.
- Underscored the importance and urgency of the work currently being conducted by the Polio Oversight Board to strengthen and clarify the governance structure of the GPEI, with a view to address weaknesses identified in the 8th IMB report. PPG stakeholders expect to be briefed on such efforts at their next high-level meeting in April 2014.
- Stressed the importance of continued country-level, results-oriented, positive collaboration between GPEI and GAVI, which includes prioritising routine immunisation strengthening as a strategy against polio virus transmission. The PPG recognized the daunting scale of IPV scale up, appreciated the more thorough strategy presented, and looked forward to being briefed again in the future, including on outstanding questions related to pricing and timelines.
- Requested that options for strengthening financial and programmatic reporting, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, be presented to the PPG for consideration at its next meeting in April 2014.

The PPG asked the two Co-Chairs to send the PPG Chairs' Statement to the GPEI Polio Oversight Board, the Polio Steering Committee, and the Independent Monitoring Board for their consideration and action.