
MEETING REPORT

Workshop on Transition Planning and Implementation of the Global Polio Partners Group (PPG)

Friday, 31 March 2017

Please note that the meeting presentations are available on the [PPG website](#).

Discussion points

- The attendance was excellent and based on the level of discussion the presentations seemed well-received.
- A sense of urgency towards the finalization of country plans was expressed. The priority countries are engaged in transition planning, although there are variations in their level of engagement. In those countries facing humanitarian crises progress is particularly challenging. A process that effectively coordinates the “bottom up” and “top down” elements remains critical.
- Participants also discussed the implications of the budget ramp down which has already started at country level and the need to mitigate risks.
- Participants noted that there are existing tools available for various assessment missions to use, like the Gavi Joint Appraisals. These Joint External Evaluation tools should also be used to assess country capacity under the International Health Regulations. Participants stressed the need to align those processes around the functioning of the national routine immunization systems as the fundamental piece to ensure sustainability and to implement SDG 3.
- The Measles and Rubella Initiative (MRI) issued an invitation to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) to work together towards their goal, highlighting the opportunities for synergies between both partnerships in terms of strengthening routine immunization and surveillance systems. The GPEI positively welcomed this and extended an invitation to MRI to attend their regional meetings.
- Ongoing collaboration between GAVI and GPEI was further encouraged, including through the GAVI Joint Appraisals that look at how the budget of individual countries is shaping up with regards to the polio ramp down at country level and its impact on national immunization programmes.
- Participants highlighted the key role of the Transition Management Group in facilitating coordination on transition planning both at country and global level. High-level engagement of Governments, main GPEI partners and other health entities with vested interests in polio transition was seen as a pre-requisite for a successful transition.

- There was agreement on the urgent need to develop the GPEI post-certification strategy, that will identify the essential polio functions needed to maintain a polio free-world, where will they sit, as well as the associated financial and human resources. The discussion addressed the possibilities of mainstreaming the essential functions, integrating others into existing structures or programmes, and discontinuing others.
- With regards to GPEI sunset options, serious concerns were raised on ending prematurely the GPEI, highlighting its unique coordinating role, and on how the essential functions will continue to be maintained with a focus on the capacities required such as optimal surveillance, appropriate containment measures, strong outbreak response tactics, etc. Participants recommended a cautious and thoughtful approach to transition that would ensure stopping transmission of the virus once and for all, avoiding previous mistakes, such as undetected immunity and circulation gaps (e.g. Northern Nigeria for >4 years).
- There was general agreement on the need to consider establishing a mechanism to ensure the oversight of and be accountable for all the various transition activities and possibly to continue into the post-certification phase. Others expressed a preference for prioritizing the transfer of capacities to the local level, rather than focusing on the structure, while preserving some kind of coordination.
- The debate subsequently focused on the internal polio transition processes of the two implementing UN agencies of the GPEI: UNICEF and the WHO. UNICEF's presentation emphasized the opportunities for immunization strengthening in the framework of polio transition and will be reflected in UNICEF's Immunisation Roadmap (2017-2030) which is currently under development. In addition, participants encouraged UNICEF to raise this issue at its Executive Board for discussion, including the human resources aspect. GPEI currently funds 237 staff positions and 266 consultants working at UNICEF.
- Concerning WHO, participants highlighted the need for a managed transition to avoid programmatic, financial and human-resource-related risks at the three levels of the Organization. Financing transition is a paramount issue that needs to be discussed at WHO governing bodies as well as with other stakeholders. WHO is working on developing a strong business case for its transition planning. WHO programme absorption capacity is a big challenge. There appears to be a disconnect between the WHO Programme budget 2018-2019 to be approved at WHA 70 in May 2017 and polio transition financial needs. Participants requested clarification on the flexibility of this programme budget, taking into account that the post-certification strategy will only be finalized by the end of 2017 and submitted to WHA 71 in 2018. Participants encouraged exploring synergies with other WHO programmes, such as the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, and recommended exploring the possibility of cross-sharing staff.
- WHO Country Offices heavily rely on GPEI funded staff and the polio infrastructure at country level has been used rather systematically by other health programmes. The national absorption capacity of the priority countries varies substantially. It would be unrealistic to expect all of them to be capable of absorbing all personnel and/or assets. To this end, detailed evidence-based data on a country by country basis is needed. WHO expects to present this information by the WHO Executive Board in January 2018. A proposal to develop indicators on transition was put forward.

- Participants agreed on the importance of sending a clear message to the next WHO Director General to place polio transition among the top 10 priorities for the Organization.
- In comparison to the experiences with Smallpox, participants agreed on the importance of capturing and applying lessons learned in the effort to eradicate polio into other health and humanitarian interventions.
- Participants highlighted the role the PPG can play in supporting the efforts aimed at ensuring a smooth and efficient transition, including through convening polio transition workshops when appropriate.
- Participants agreed that the summary report of this meeting will be submitted by the Co-Chairs to the GPEI Polio Oversight Board, the Strategy Committee and the Transition Independent Monitoring Board. In addition, as agreed during the workshop, the summary report will be further submitted to the WHO Meeting of Member States that will be held on Friday 28th April 2017 to inform the discussions.