

POLIO OVERSIGHT BOARD

Meeting of 18 August 2020

On August 18, the Polio Oversight Board (POB) of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) convened to assess the status of polio eradication. The Board reviewed progress on resumption of vaccination campaigns after the Covid-19 induced pause, programme transformation in Pakistan, the increase in circulating Vaccine Derived Polio Virus (cVDPV) outbreaks, and the financial situation. The discussion was informed by the recent reports of the [Independent Monitoring Board](#), the [Pakistan and Afghanistan Technical Advisory Groups](#) and the participation of major donors.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the polio eradication programme with paused campaigns, disruption of essential immunization and a decline in surveillance quality. The Board was humbled by the commitment of [front-line polio staff](#) to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and who also recognized the importance of safely restarting campaigns to deliver polio vaccines in communities while the COVID virus circulates.

The pandemic demonstrates the critical role of GPEI funded staff for global health security and underlined the importance of integrating

functions into the broader immunization and emergencies infrastructure to ensure the critical public health workforce remains a global asset even after the world has eradicated polio.

Agility, innovation and discipline, driven by a focus on activities on the critical path to polio eradication, are needed to offset the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. GPEI will re-establish high-quality surveillance, intensify access negotiations in Afghanistan, accelerate the transformation of the Pakistan programme, and facilitate the resumption of immunization campaigns emphasizing the delivery of additional interventions when and where possible.

In view of the dynamic challenges faced, the POB approved a process to revise the 2019-2023 Polio Eradication Strategy and related budget, including the establishment of an external advisory group to advise on its content. To ensure that GPEI is best positioned to implement the revised strategy, the Board requested quick action on the Governance Review and complementary management review.

The Board reviewed with great concern the financial status of the Polio programme. Appreciating the generous pledges of support announced in Abu Dhabi in November 2019, programmatic developments have put acute pressure on available resources. These developments include the setbacks in interrupting wild poliovirus in the two remaining polio endemic countries, a marked increase of cVDPV outbreaks, additional costs of infection prevention in the context of COVID-19 and the need to catch up on paused campaigns. This is compounded by economic impacts of the pandemic globally, which constrain financial resources and political attention in both programme and donor countries, leading to an anticipated substantial shortfall between resources required and resources available in 2021.

The Polio Oversight Board reviewed a plan to optimize the use of available and projected resources in 2021 and agreed that efficiencies can be realized. Board members also expressed concern that the level of risk associated with some of the proposed

programmatic reductions could jeopardize both the gains and investments of the last 30 years and impede success. As an immediate step, GPEI will implement low risk-high return efficiency savings and strive to integrate efforts with other health interventions. The Board committed to advocating to increase national ownership and commitment, to raise the additional resources needed to meet urgent programme requirements and to intensify the response to the extraordinary challenges that have arisen, including exploring the use of COVID-19 resources where appropriate.

The POB reaffirmed the unequivocal commitment of GPEI partners to achieving global polio eradication.

The Board thanks all stakeholders for their commitment and support that has brought polio so close to eradication. We urge all partners and countries to continue to invest both human and financial resources in polio eradication and essential immunization so that no child needs suffer paralysis from this preventable disease.

