

Global Polio Partners Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustaining Essential Polio Functions in the Context of Polio Transition - 11 May 2022

Within the context of polio eradication and transition, PPG is convening a series of “deep dives” to discuss with relevant stakeholders the future of polio essential functions, especially surveillance.

This first meeting focused on the impact of the polio funding ramp down and the COVID-19 pandemic on transition efforts and polio surveillance, aiming to identify the information required by donors to make investment decisions, and discuss specific areas for CSO engagement.

Session 1 - Status of Transition

Panelists focused on the different approaches to transition taken in the three priority regions (Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and South-East Asia), speaking to the opportunities, challenges, and lessons learned:

- A key theme was the importance of government ownership, guided by a milestone-driven and contextually appropriate transition plan. High-risk and outbreak countries must communicate the dual need to tackle polio outbreaks, as well as move forward on transition. In these contexts, it is vital that transition is paced to country readiness, to prevent loss of surveillance capacity.
- A secondary theme was integration, which is vital to help halt polio outbreaks, reach missed children and strengthen the health system. Community-based health workers have an important role to support surveillance and sustain the polio gains.
- The final key theme was sustainable financing. In a challenging funding context, a top focus must be securing flexible funding to support countries that cannot absorb essential functions in the near term. From this perspective, donors, as well as civil society, need to be more engaged in transition conversations.

Session 2 - Surveillance in Transition Countries

This session included a series of technical presentations, highlighting the impact of transition and the COVID-19 pandemic on VPD surveillance (and in particular polio surveillance), efforts taken by GPEI and WHO to mitigate risks, and the future potential of GPEI electronic platforms, like AVADAR. The discussion focused primarily on the utility of the AVADAR network for polio and broader disease surveillance.

Session 3 - Looking Towards the Future

During the group discussion, speakers made the following key points, drawing on their areas of expertise with regards to certification, transition and surveillance:

- Ensuring that polio surveillance indicators remain at certification standard long after eradication will require diligence and perseverance. If the quality and scope of AFP surveillance declines, environmental surveillance may prove the most dependable model for long-term poliovirus surveillance.

- A one-size-fits-all approach to transition does not work. The process must be guided by country readiness. It is imperative that partners support national governments to increase ownership and commitment.
- Sustaining surveillance in challenging settings requires the involvement of national, local and community stakeholders, flexibility within the surveillance system, and a swift response to declines in surveillance sensitivity.

Conclusion

In closing, the Co-Chairs summarized four key messages:

- Country ownership and cross-cutting collaboration will be the key to success but will also take time.
- While polio transition strategies are being adopted and implemented, the ramping down of capacities needs to be handled very carefully to prevent gaps in surveillance quality.
- The role of community health workers should be carefully considered. They are vital not only for eradication, but also for broader public health, and advocacy.
- Finally, success depends on fully funding the polio programme and providing flexible and sustainable financing to the WHO.