

## Meeting of the Polio Oversight Board (POB)

30 August 2023 | 4:30 – 6:00 PST / 7:30 – 9:00 EST / 13:30 – 15:00 CET

### Meeting Minutes

**POB Member Attendees:** Chris Elias (POB Chair, BMGF); Omar Abdi, representing Catherine Russell (UNICEF); Mike McGovern (Rotary); Mandy Cohen (CDC); Aurelia Nguyen (Gavi); Peter MacDougall (Donor Representative - Global Affairs Canada)

#### Summary of Decisions & Action Items

<i>Decision</i>	<i>Topic</i>	
<b>POB unanimously endorsed the updated Financial Accountability Committee Terms of Reference</b>	Financial Accountability ToRs	
<i>Action Point</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
<b>Include an agenda session on integration at the October POB meeting</b>	POB Secretariat	October 2023
<b>Share an update on the Global Certification Committee decisions and rationale</b>	EMU	October 2023
<b>Strategy Committee (SC) to provide specific requests for POB leadership engagement</b>	Aidan O’Leary, SC Chair	Ongoing

#### Opening Remarks

Dr. Elias welcomed CDC Director Mandy Cohen as a new POB member, as well as Aurelia Nguyen, who will represent Gavi until a new CEO is identified. He noted the focus for the meeting as the preparatory discussion for the 2023 Strategic Program Review that will be presented at the in-person October POB meeting, as well as a decision on the updated terms of reference for the Financial Accountability Committee (FAC).

#### Preparatory discussion: 2023 GPEI Strategic Program Review

**Presenters:** Sir Liam Donaldson (IMB Chair), Andrew Kennedy (WHO), and Hamid Jafari (WHO)

Sir Liam Donaldson presented the following:

- The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) conducted a review and assessment of the polio eradication program’s progress during the 11 – 13 July IMB meeting. The meeting began with a self-assessment of GPEI’s performance and progress, followed by deeper dives into various

aspects of the program, as well as meetings with the GPEI Strategy Committee, donors, and wider polio partners. Meetings were held with government delegations from Pakistan, Nigeria, and DRC. A meeting with the Afghanistan Health Minister was delayed but held later in Geneva. The Minister faces pressure to prioritize basic healthcare, particularly hospital services, over polio eradication. Campaigns were cancelled earlier in the year but have since resumed. Regional accountability will continue to be critical to progress, and the EMRO Regional Subcommittee for polio eradication has been a useful forum in this regard.

- The IMB report will be shared in advance of the in-person POB meeting in October. The Transition Independent Monitoring Board (TIMB) report was recently published and has important areas of overlap with the polio eradication program with regard to the period after interruption of poliovirus transmission. Both the IMB and TIMB reports will be discussed in detail at the October in-person POB meeting.

Andrew Kennedy (WHO) and Hamid Jafari (WHO) presented the following:

- As part of the GPEI’s 2022 – 2026 strategy, a midterm assessment at the end of 2023 was included to take an in-depth review of progress towards reaching interruption by the end of 2023, and certifying eradication by the end of 2026. Leading up to the IMB review, the GPEI conducted a self-assessment of progress and identified areas where corrective action plans are required.
- The program is closer than ever on Goal 1, interrupting transmission of wild poliovirus (WPV), with the number of transmission chains significantly reduced. However, in the past few months, transmission expanded in Eastern Afghanistan, with a subsequent detection in Pakistan, leaving this goal at risk. Political uncertainty and security challenges are the biggest risks to eradication, while the program believes epidemiological and operational risks are manageable. Since the strategy has been developed, the Global Certification Committee (GCC) has revised the criteria for Goal 1 certification to require a two-year period without WPV cases in endemic areas.
- Goal 2, interrupting circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV) by the end of 2023, is off-track, with discussions happening across the partnership on needed strategic shifts to reach this goal. There have been positive trends on viral burden, but the effectiveness of the response in the most consequential geographies, including Eastern DRC, Northern Nigeria, Central Somalia, and North Yemen, will impact interruption timelines. Inaccessibility, security risks, political instability, and other challenges in these geographies will require tailored solutions at the district level. Timeliness and quality of response, as well as surveillance remain challenging. nOPV2 has been successfully rolled out and the anticipated 2023 supply is forecast to meet program demands, however the supply situation remains fragile with one supplier. The GCC has not yet established criteria for Goal 2 certification, but this will be decided at their November 2023 meeting.
- The program is working to maintain the currently approved 2022 – 2026 GPEI budget of \$4.8B. Should timelines shift, the program will need to make a full assessment once certification criteria are established.
- GPEI is looking forward to the recommendations of the IMB and the program’s response will be presented at the October POB meeting.

The POB thanked the presenters, and the following observations and questions were raised:

- Chris Elias noted the recent POB visit to Pakistan, as well as his meetings in Botswana for the AFRO Regional Committee Meeting, highlighting the strong political commitment he saw, as well as the unique challenges in each environment. He emphasized the dire context in Afghanistan, which is experiencing one of the worst humanitarian crises today. The polio program is one of the few programs that is still operational in the country and there are many challenges operating in this environment. The Chair agreed with the assessment of progress against Goals 1 & 2 and highlighted the importance of the POB preparing for the discussions in Berlin, considering the forthcoming recommendations from the IMB and the program's strategic review. He encouraged the Strategy Committee (SC) to provide specific requests for POB leadership engagement in particular regions and stressed the importance of granular analysis to inform strategies in challenging areas. He flagged the need to understand the potential impact on the budget if the goalposts change and suggested analyzing both potential scenarios of certification timelines remaining unchanged or being adjusted.
- Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari (WHO) highlighted the outreach efforts of the health ministers from UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia with the de facto Afghanistan government. He noted a planned regional meeting next week in Qatar on this issue and the commitment to maintain regional pressure on polio eradication efforts. He highlighted the lack of basic health services as a big challenge to polio eradication goals, noting the importance of organizations working together to address the evolving healthcare situation. On Goal 2, he expressed optimism that cVDPV2 transmission could be interrupted in Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia by the end of 2023, with ongoing efforts in Yemen. He noted Egypt has demonstrated high polio immunity due to quality campaigns, Somalia has faced operational challenges but is working to overcome them, and Sudan implemented vaccination rounds and improved immunity despite conflicts. Yemen still has ongoing transmission of cVDPV2 in the north, and there are concerted advocacy efforts from across the region to gain access.
- Aurelia Nguyen highlighted the need for coordination of support across Afghanistan and Pakistan as an epidemiological block and noted that the dire state of health services in Afghanistan underscores the importance of integrating interventions and other immunizations as much as possible. She shared appreciation for the effective response to the WPV1 outbreak in Malawi and Mozambique but noted concern on the cVDPV transmission in the consequential geographies. She flagged there is more to be done on integration at the country level and requested a deeper dive on this topic at the October POB meeting. Additionally, she noted there has been good work done with the Health Campaign Effectiveness Coalition and requested a readout to help inform integration opportunities. Lastly, she asked for more information on the scientific rationale behind the suggestion to reduce the certification timeframe from 3 years to 2 years, particularly in terms of surveillance sensitivity.
  - Chris Elias acknowledged the request for an October session on integration and highlighted the potential lessons from recent examples of integration efforts in African countries that were responding to both the WPV1 outbreak as well as a historic cholera outbreak.

- Peter MacDougall stressed the importance donors place on the IMB’s analysis and recommendations and called for more frequent strategic discussions and reporting to take full advantage of the expertise offered. He highlighted the need to act promptly on the IMB recommendations to avoid missed opportunities. He emphasized the need to address areas of concern, including integration, optimizing site-to-site modalities, and the quality and timeliness of vaccination campaigns, in order to understand why progress is off track and how partners can course correct. Lastly, he noted donors offer support and networks to address issues of political commitment, particularly in regions with upcoming elections.
- Mike McGovern expressed Rotary’s unwavering commitment to the goal of eradicating polio and noted Rotarians remain hopeful about achieving the first goal by the end of the year. He emphasized the need for clear communication and a unified strategy in addressing the polio outbreak in Afghanistan, involving all stakeholders, including the de facto government. The importance of speaking with one voice and building consensus among various groups was highlighted. He also stressed the significance of improving routine immunization rates in Africa to eliminate all types of polio, commending the efforts of WHO, UNICEF, and others but noting there is still a long road ahead. Lastly, he encouraged continued focus on integration.
- Omar Abdi emphasized the need for long-term strategies to address outbreaks in consequential geographies like Eastern Congo and Central Somalia, focusing on containment and strengthening routine immunization in surrounding areas. He looked forward to hearing different scenarios and relevant strategies at the October meeting.
- Mandy Cohen shared her gratitude for the warm welcome to the POB and highlighted the strong work of the GPEI. In addition to underscoring the importance of articulating a strategy, she stressed that for Goal 2, where it seems unlikely the 2023 target will be met, there is a need for a credible plan to stop all types of cVDPVs to enhance overall credibility in this work.
- Eva Kadilli (UNICEF) acknowledged the challenges with achieving Goal 2 and emphasized the importance of improving the quality of campaigns in regions to meet the goals. She suggested the possibility of joint visits in Somalia and Madagascar to garner government commitment and support. She also highlighted the need to address barriers to integrating polio vaccination into routine immunization programs and called for a deeper examination of these challenges at the country level to facilitate progress.

**Action Item:**

- Include an agenda session on integration at the October POB meeting.
- Share an update on the Global Certification Committee decisions and rationale.
- Strategy Committee (SC) to provide specific requests for POB leadership engagement.

**Update to Financial Accountability Committee Terms of Reference- for decision**

**Presenter: Mike McGovern, FAC Chair**

The following update was presented to the POB:

- The FAC terms of reference were last revised in 2021 as part of the GPEI Governance Review. To ensure the FAC is operating effectively, a subcommittee of the FAC led a review of the ToRs with input from donors and key stakeholders.

- The subcommittee concluded that while the remit of the ToRs was appropriate, the execution needed refinement. They emphasized the need for more timely engagement with financial reporting, and closer coordination and feedback with the POB on financial matters. Increased coordination with the Strategy Committee was also recommended, and this is already being implemented.
- Minor modifications were made to the previous ToRs to provide clarification, with recommendations made on implementation.

Decision:

- The POB unanimously endorsed the updated Financial Accountability Committee Terms of Reference.

**Closing Remarks**

The Chair thanked the attendees for their time and engagement. He noted the upcoming in-person POB meeting on 14 October in Berlin and looked forward to that discussion. The meeting was followed by a 30-minute closed executive session.