

Orientation of a core group of experts on acceleration of scale up of PMTCT and Paediatric HIV Care and Treatment and care to improve child health and survival.

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HIV/ AIDS has become a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in women and children in high burden countries in the region. In most of these countries, prevention of transmission from HIV infected mother to baby is a priority. The international community has recognized the magnitude of the problem and several Global and Regional initiatives have been launched to reinforce countries' efforts to scale up prevention of mother to child transmission and paediatric care programmes. WHO and UNICEF are playing a leading role in supporting countries to scale up.

To further boost country efforts to accelerate the scale up of PMTCT and Paediatric HIV/AIDS as an integral component of high impact interventions for child survival, the UNITAID initiative has been set up to provide support to 8 countries (seven in the African region and one in Asia) that are among countries that have benefited from joint missions ie Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia, Tanzania and India. The second phase of the initiative will benefit other countries including Swaziland, Lesotho and Kenya. The aims of the UNITAID Initiative are to:

- Improve the efficacy of PMTCT interventions by facilitating the switch from SD NVP to more efficacious ARV regimens, including ART for eligible women to prevent MTCT during pregnancy, labor and delivery and through breastfeeding
- Increase programme coverage through the availability of significant quantities of diagnostics for HIV testing, ARV prophylaxis for pregnant women and babies, and a time-limited supply of ART (up to one year) for the mother to ensure the continued health status.

The successful implementation of the initiative will result in increased geographical coverage of the interventions; increase in service uptake; introduction of more efficacious regimens ; improved linkages to care and treatment; decreased mortality for mothers and children thus contributing towards achieving the MDGs 4,5 and 6 in reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and reducing HIV infections and its impact. in improving maternal and child health. Although the focus of the workshop is on the UNITAID countries, the participating experts would be available to support other countries in their efforts to scale up.

At a planning meeting of the UNITAID countries to discuss preparations to implement the UNITAID initiative, a number of key areas were identified by participants as gaps in skills which needed to be urgently addressed:

1. Need for orientation on implementation of the new PMTCT guidelines including use of more efficacious regimens
2. Implementing routine offer of testing and counselling
3. Use of Dried Blood Spots for early diagnosis in children
4. Clinical and immunological staging of HIV infected pregnant women and children.
5. Infant feeding counselling and support
6. Use of co-trimoxazole prophylaxis for HIV infected mothers and children
7. Mother-infant follow up and linkages to appropriate packages of health and other services.
8. Monitoring and evaluation indicators and strengthening of system for tracking progress and refining programmes.

It is in the context of addressing the needs of countries that a series of two workshops are organized by WHO and UNICEF for Anglophone and Francophone countries. The first workshop will be for the 5 mainly Anglophone countries already benefiting from UNITAID support: Rwanda, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and India. The workshop will also include countries like Lesotho, Swaziland and Kenya which are considered for the second phase of UNITAID support. The participation of India, which is not in this region is through recommendations by UNICEF New York and WHO HQ as it is the only UNITAID supported country outside of AFRO region. The workshop for the Francophone countries will follow at a later date.

General Objective

To strengthen the capacity of a core group of experts at regional and national levels to provide high quality technical assistance to countries for the implementation of the UNITAID Initiative in the scale up of PMTCT and Paediatric HIV/AIDS treatment within the context of improving child health and survival.

Specific Objectives

1. To orient a core group of experts on operationalising in the context of the national scale up plan the:
 - phasing in of more efficacious ARV regimens and co-trimoxazole for eligible pregnant women with HIV infection
 - WHO UNAIDS guidelines on provider Initiated testing and counselling including for pregnant women and children
 - WHO guidelines on infant diagnosis, paediatric care and treatment and co-trimoxazole prophylaxis.
 - WHO updated recommendations on IF and HIV including infant feeding counselling and support.
2. To improve capacity in laboratory techniques and logistic management for the scale up of PMTCT and Paediatric HIV/AIDS treatment and care with a focus on:

- Early Diagnosis of HIV in children using DBS and PCR technologies
 - CD4 testing for staging of HIV positive pregnant women
3. To review mechanisms to track progress on the UNITAID initiative in the context of national ME system.

Expected Outcomes

1. A core group of experts oriented on programmatic issues of the implementation of the new guidelines on Providers Initiated Testing and Counselling, PMTCT, Paediatric Care and infant feeding in HIV.
2. The capacity of a core group of experts strengthened on practical issues to consider in providing TA to countries for the phased scale up of Early Diagnosis of HIV in children using DBS and PCR technologies, and for the CD4 testing for staging of HIV positive pregnant women.
3. Capacity strengthened on mechanisms to track progress on UNITAID implementation in the context of national ME system

Method of work

1. Plenary presentations
2. Group work
3. Site visits
4. Lab demonstrations and practice.

Reference documents

- a. The Abuja Call to Action
- b. Report of the Nairobi UNITAID Planning meeting.
- c. Reports of in –country UNITAID meetings (Zambia, Malawi, Cote d’Ivoire, and Burkina Faso).
- d. WHO ARV guidelines for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV in infants and young children
- e. WHO case definitions of HIV for surveillance and revised clinical staging and immunological classification of HIV-related disease in adults and children
- f. WHO guidelines on co-trimoxazole prophylaxis
- g. Antiretroviral therapy for HIV infection in infants and children in resource limited settings: Toward universal access
- h. Operational guide for national PMTCT programmes on WHO recommended antiretroviral drug regimes for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants in resource-limited settings. A public health approach
- i. Monitoring Guide for ART
- j. Guidance for Global Scale up for Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV.

- k.** Draft Plan of Action for Operationlising the Guidance for Global Scale up for Prevention of MTCT of HIV.
- l.** HIV and Infant Feeding: Framework for Priority Action
- m.** Guidelines on DBS , laboratory