Background on the rationale and methods for developing the WHO Position Paper on Larviciding

There is renewed interest in attacks on the breeding sites of malaria vector mosquitoes ('larval source management', LSM) as a means of malaria control [1,2,3]. In particular, several African countries are currently planning a substantial expansion of larviciding activities [4]. However, effective larviciding for malaria control requires precise knowledge of the local breeding sites; whether or not these countries have the necessary specialised local expertise is therefore an important question.

For these reasons, WHO has been asked by a range of partners to clarify its recommendations concerning the role of larviciding as a means of malaria control. Since larviciding must compete for public resources with other interventions that are proven and life-saving, and since the decision to employ larviciding may sometimes be taken by non-experts, it is important that these decision-makers have access to independent and evidence-based guidance as to where such methods should and should not be used.

This position statement is the product of a review of existing evidence and programmatic practice by entomologists within the WHO-GMP Vector Control Unit. Because of the very meager volume of high quality data, it was felt that expert opinion needed to play a more prominent role in the development of the paper. Therefore, WHO-GMP undertook an extensive consultation exercise: in September 2011, a first draft was sent to a list of 100 experts drawn from the Vector Control Working Group and WHO contact lists, and chosen for regional balance as well as an interest in larval control of malaria vectors and/or practical knowledge of malaria vector control. Nearly 50 replies were received, and on the basis of this feedback, many changes were made, including two major ones: 1) the scope of the statement was restricted to larviciding, instead of larval control in general; and 2) more attention was paid to the potential advantages of larviciding (in certain environments).

Most vector control experts agree that there are some specific circumstances where larviciding programmes can be effective and useful for malaria control, and many other circumstances where such efforts unlikely to be cost-effective [5]. For malaria vector control, the key question is how national programme managers can distinguish between situations where larviciding is likely to be useful and cost-effective, and those where it is inappropriate.

[4] Notably, these programmes are mostly using national rather than donor resources.