Update on policy-setting by the WHO Global Malaria Programme

February 2015, Geneva, Switzerland

Introduction
The policy-setting process at the Global Malaria Programme (GMP) was transformed in 2011 with the creation of the Malaria Policy Advisory Committee (MPAC), the establishment of standing technical expert groups (TEGs) and the decision to regularly convene evidence review groups (ERGs) to review evidence and provide advice on specific technical topics. These changes have enabled WHO to strengthen the transparency and credibility of its evidence review and policy-setting process. The new process has been praised by both internal and external stakeholders as a key element of GMP's contribution to the malaria community.

Now that MPAC has met six times, this is a good opportunity to review how GMP might optimize this valued and important framework to:

- clarify the overall architecture of policy-setting
- better leverage TEGs, ERGs and MPAC
- improve communication and dissemination of new WHO policies and guidance.

These three topics are the focus of this pre-read, which provides elements of background on the policy-setting process, and an overview of the proposed adjustments.

Background
A review of GMP's policy-setting process was needed because the impressive global progress on malaria between 2004 and 2011, coupled with major investments in malaria research, required WHO to rapidly review increasing amounts of evidence, and update technical recommendations and guidance. The creation of MPAC, the establishment of TEGs and the decision to call specialized ERGs have been a great success. Today, MPAC meetings are perceived both by internal and external stakeholders as highly relevant to the needs of the malaria community.

However, in the spirit of continuous improvement and in the rapidly evolving context – including the expected endorsement of the Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030 in May 2015 and agenda for acceleration towards elimination – we have identified some areas that could be better clarified or streamlined for efficiency. The key points to review are related to structural issues and the clarification of roles and responsibilities among the different parties.

One opportunity to increase efficiency relates to the overall architecture of the framework. As it is currently set up, the framework organigram suggests that the MPAC leads and manages all collaboration with TEGs and ERGs. In practice, although all TEG and ERG reports have recently been submitted to MPAC, it is actually the GMP technical staff that put together the meeting agendas, manage the documents and evidence for review, and prepare the reports.
Another area that could benefit from review is the management of the MPAC agenda. Often, the agendas have been quite dense, and have covered a wide range of topics on which guidance is needed, in a context where the tools and implementation strategies are evolving rapidly. The MPAC was often asked to act as a “validator” even on issues that were straightforward, and on which there was little debate. This “overbooking” can be linked partly to a tendency to systematically elevate issues to MPAC level, even when no actual advice is needed, following advice from a TEG.

The third area for improvement is the communication of policy recommendations and guidance documents that come out of the MPAC process. GMP produces many norms and standards, and guidance dissemination could be improved through the development of clear, actionable policy briefings to guide implementation at region and country level.

Finally, GMP plans to reduce the amount of time between an MPAC meeting and the publication of the meeting report in the *Malaria Journal*, and develop a more reader-friendly, concise format for the report.

**Issues for MPAC consideration: proposed adjustments to the policy-setting process**

**Further streamline the policy-setting process**

To streamline the process and ensure that the best use is made of MPAC in its advisory capacity, GMP will strengthen its involvement in the TEG and ERG process, follow up on the technical advice put forward by these groups, and only present selected issues of strategic importance to the MPAC. GMP will continue to manage the convening of all TEGs and ERGs, will carefully articulate technical questions to drive the discussion and outputs of TEGs and ERGs, ensure continuity and follow-up between MPAC meetings, and keep the MPAC informed of developments.

**Clarify principles regarding composition of MPAC, TEGs and ERGs**

Appropriate member selection and carefully drafted principles of participation are key to ensuring the credibility and transparency of evidence review and policy advice process. As such, we have clarified the following points regarding the composition of MPAC, TEGs and ERGs:

- members of TEGs and MPAC should be diverse and represent different geographies, genders and expertise;
- need to ensure the right expertise is brought to the table: programmatic experience is required on all TEGs;
- a maximum of two MPAC members can participate on any TEG, and a maximum of one MPAC member on any ERG;
- the standard observer rules for TEGs and ERGs that have been developed by GMP will be observed consistently across all committees;
- observers are welcome at MPAC and will be managed by the chair to maintain inclusivity and transparency; and
- there will be a standard induction for new members of MPAC and TEGs, so that they understand their responsibilities and what is expected of them, including that they not speak to the media about evidence reviews.

GMP will conduct a review of the current TEGs membership list to identify potential adjustments or additional capacity, to ensure diversity of gender, geography and expertise.
Reposition MPAC as an advisor on key topics only

MPAC’s agenda needs to be simplified so that it can focus on its role as the highest-level technical advisory body to WHO on malaria. It should not be asked to validate all guidance, but instead should focus on the key technical questions on which GMP needs strategic advice. Concretely, the agenda will be determined from a running list of priority topics kept and reviewed on a monthly basis by GMP, and all MPAC agenda items will be clearly marked as “for information”, “for advice” or “for decision”. In general, the reports and recommendations from TEGs and ERGs should be for information, unless they have significant impact, are controversial or are thought by GMP to require MPAC advice.

Better communicate WHO policy recommendations and guidance

GMP will undertake to standardize and improve the materials and dissemination of policy recommendations, policy briefs and other guidance to inform national programmes and other stakeholders of the malaria community. This overall effort will include reviewing the packaging of recommendations and guidance to facilitate uptake by countries, and it is envisioned that this will culminate in the consolidation of a “global handbook” on malaria programme guidance. The vision of the handbook is to propose a single compendium of malaria-related recommendations, in a user-friendly format that will enable countries and other stakeholders to have rapid access to a comprehensive overview of the WHO guidance on malaria.

As far as the outputs of MPAC are concerned, some slight improvements can also be implemented to improve dissemination of guidance or advice, such as:

- all guidance and policy recommendations should be translated into French, Spanish and Arabic;
- the length and format of the Malaria Journal articles, which will be submitted one month after each MPAC meeting, will be streamlined for a more concise summary of the meeting discussion and outcomes (impact to be evaluated in early 2016); and
- GMP will publish a brief post-meeting report on the Internet in the week after each meeting. This summary may be published before absolute consensus, noting areas where discussion is ongoing.

Requested action by MPAC

For advice.