Executive Summary: Key outcomes and actions

The third meeting of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group (STAG-IH) was convened to provide technical and strategic advice to the Executive Director (EXD), WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) on 1) the ongoing Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); and 2) disease prevention & control strategies and policy perspectives on meningitis, access and benefit sharing and Nagoya Protocol implementation, and development of a comprehensive research agenda. The meeting was also an opportunity for STAG-IH to be updated on recent activities from various groups (IOAC, GPMB, World Bank’s PEF, HSI-TAG, ACVVR) and to discuss STAG-IH’s function and composition.

1. Technical review of the ongoing DRC EVD outbreak response
   • STAG-IH will provide recommendations to the EXD and will publish a summary of recommendations in the public domain. STAG-IH proposes EXD to send a mission composed by STAG-IH members to DRC and engage L'Institut National de Recherche Biomédical (INRB) to facilitate implementation of their recommendations.
   • STAG-IH will approach the SAGE Working Group on EVD vaccines and propose technical discussion on several issues of concern, e.g., vaccine efficacy.

2. Disease prevention & control strategies and policy perspectives
   • Defeating Meningitis by 2030: STAG-IH supports the full scope of the approach and inclusion of the disability component; sequelae surveillance should be included. Other suggestions were to frame the diagnostics and surveillance components in a more integrated way by use of a multi-disease platform approach, and to give attention to mass gathering events. The group agreed to provide additional input as requested; consideration will be given to including a STAG-IH member on the development workgroup. A concern was raised by a STAG-IH member about meningitis vaccine supply shortages during coming months.
   • Access and benefit sharing and Nagoya Protocol implementation: STAG-IH was updated on the WHA outcome. STAG-IH will be updated on work progress by the WHO Secretariat (Task Force).
   • Comprehensive research agenda: STAG-IH was updated on development of the WHO Science Division led by Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, and on GOARN-R activities. The STAG-IH Secretariat showcased two operational research examples:
     a) Malaria mass drug administration during EVD outbreaks to reduce fever cases and thereby reduce the burden on fever triage centres and healthcare-associated amplification of EVD, and to benefit from house-visit activities when anti-malarials
are distributed with information and bednets to directly access people and households in EVD-affected areas.

b) Healthcare worker protection research package as opposed to pharmaceutical interventions, which consists of 1) deep-dive epidemiology to identify factors for acquiring EVD, 2) survey among medically evacuated expatriate aid workers during the 2014-16 EVD outbreak in West Africa to recall the potential exposure and behaviour for infection, 3) PPE values and preference survey, 4) development of ‘Preferred Product Characteristics’ for innovative PPE development.

STAG-IH supported promoting these types of operational research studies to accelerate disease outbreak control. STAG-IH, together with the key players of these studies, may develop perspective papers based on these examples.

3. Synergies and interactions with other global leadership and technical groups within and beyond WHO

- STAG-IH received briefings from the Chairperson of the newly born Health Security Interface Technical Advisory Group on its first meeting held in March. Professor Myoung-Don Oh will continue to serve as STAG-IH representative to the TAG while Dr Juliet Bedford asked to withdraw her involvement. No immediate replacement was nominated.
- IOAC Chair appreciated the participation of STAG-IH member (Dr Gary Kobinger) in its recent assessment mission to DRC.
- GPMB Secretariat acknowledged STAG-IH’s contribution to its report chapters by providing critical reviews and invited members to provide input on the pandemic preparedness paper currently being drafted by Tom Inglesby and Jennifer Nuzzo.
- STAG-IH was invited to provide input on development of PEF 2.0. A discussion document has been provided by the PEF Coordinator. Chair asked the Secretariat to collate members’ inputs.
- A new working group on Influenza Preparedness and Response will meet for the first time on 13 June. The outcome of the meeting will be reported to STAG-IH. Professor Lothar Wieler serves as Chair, but another member of the WG will chair the first meeting due to his absence.
- IHR (2005) and PHEIC – STAG-IH can develop an opinion paper in support of non-declaration of PHEIC and at the same time listing current problems.

4. Topics to be discussed in the next meeting in December 2019

- Arbovirus strategy
- Innovative partnerships
- Data sharing