National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) Establishment & Sustainability

Challenges & Opportunities
Partners’ Support to Countries
Lessons Learned and Future Plans

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For Effective NITAGs

- **6 Process Indicators (JRF)** to track but not able to show “ability to conduct robust evidence–based decision making and integrate into the policy process”

3 components essential to achieve this:

- **Functionality**: NITAG’s structure and operations foster timely generation of recommendations
- **Quality**: NITAG utilizes formal processes, evidence and data needed to ensure quality recommendations
- **Integration**: NITAG ‘s recommendation fully integrated into the decision making system of the country

http://www.nitag-resource.org/uploads/media/default/0001/02/74ecae86c49944eb2a25085ed108a541e716b79c.pdf
### Across Regions - Challenges: Functionality

*NITAG’s structure and operations foster the timely generation of recommendations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No formal TOR, training, agendas, annual work plans etc</th>
<th>Small states (pop$^n$ &lt;1M) - national NITAG not viable option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack secretariat and/or of too limited expertise*</td>
<td>Lack gov’t commitment and understanding</td>
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<td>NITAGs exist but not meet 6 indicators</td>
<td>Insufficient and/or non-sustainable funding &amp; resources from gov’t for ongoing support NITAG</td>
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<td>Political instability and/or civil strife preclude NITAG’s functioning</td>
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* Also affect quality

*See Yellow Book pages:361-364*
Across Regions- Challenges: Quality

NITAG utilizes formal processes and best available evidence needed to ensure quality recommendations

- Lack needed range of expertise;
- **No formalized processes to ensure quality**;
- Lack of knowledge both secretariat and members in evidence-based recommendation developments;
- Lack of access to relevant evidence (includes language problems), VPD data to support NITAG decisions;
- Poor documentation of NITAG work;
- Lack of public information about NITAGs and their work processes;
- Too narrow focus: only new vaccines; inadequate in focus public health impact;
- **Inadequate procedures for managing conflict of interest- lack SOPs**;
- Poor quality and/or failure to evaluate NITAG;
- Insufficient collaborations/ interactions between NITAGS to enhance/ optimize quality and function.

*Also affects functioning*
Across Regions- Challenges: Integration

NITAG’s recommendation fully integrated into the decision making system of the country i.e. influence immunization policy decisions

• Lack of integration: no clear role in system / not embedded in a legal/formal framework;
• NITAG activities not in country plans; low awareness of NITAG role among immunization stakeholders/population;
• NITAG activities often not discussed in GAVI Joint Appraisal and/or in debrief;
• NITAG reviews new not previously recommended vaccines nor public health impact – a gap;
• NITAG not seen as having a role in guidance on in country humanitarian crises re vaccines;
• Role confusion with other players roles/expertise (e.g. Health Technology Agencies (HTA) agencies or HTA networks- depending on how function);
• Private sector care vaccine decisions and delivery – not take into account NITAG recommendation.
Collaborative Effort: Many Partners in NITAG Establishment and Strengthening

HQ, Regional Offices, Country Offices

Other NITAGs and Countries
Enabling Factors & Opportunities for NITAG Establishment and Strengthening

1. Build on existing advisory committees: e.g. polio, - Caution – be wary if stays vertical;
2. Increase partnerships with local and regional organizations (WAHO);
3. Develop tools to support NITAG establishment & ongoing functions so of quality;
4. Diversify sources of funding for NITAG support;
5. Support Global NITAG Network & RTAGs: sharing resources, best practices, peer-to-peer technical assistance;
6. Facilitate sharing expertise between experienced NITAGs and newly established ones;
7. Involve recent vaccine initiatives e.g. rota (RAVIN), flu(PIVI);
8. Assessing small states/territory NITAG solutions e.g. subregional networks or partnerships with neighbouring NITAG to address the availability of expertise issue.
Examples Resources and Tools Developed

NITAG Development
• Guidance Document Establishment and Functioning of a NITAG;
• Guidelines for defining NITAG annual Work Plan.

Resources for NITAG Strengthening
• Step by step guidelines to issue evidence-informed recommendations by NITAGs;
• Framework for Prioritization of Vaccine Introductions;
• Training tools;
• NITAG Evaluation Tool;

NITAG Cost Effectiveness Guidance
• Cost-effectiveness resources including TRIVAC, CERVIVAC, COSTVAC, OLIVES, etc.

Platforms
• NITAG Resource Center;
• Global NITAG Network.

AMP-HPID work – core principles:
listening, context, culture, sharing,
collaboration- i.e. develop resources and tools to address gaps –enhance country ownership

See Yellow Book pages:374-378
NITAG RESOURCE CENTRE

• Interactive and global platform: dedicated to NITAG members and secretariats worldwide.
• One-stop-shop for all NITAG related information.
• Helps develop the NITAG community, promotes collaborations and fosters network of NITAG members.
• Makes available:
  – Guidance, tools and training material;
  – NITAG publications sent by individual country;
  – Technical reports from partners;
  – Scientific publications useful to NITAG members.
• Language – navigation languages: English, French, Spanish, Russian - documents in language as submitted ***.
• Managed by AMP-HPID- very effective and efficient.

http://www.nitag-resource.org/about
NITAG Evaluations

• SIVAC developed NITAG tool- see NRC site.
• 3 components of focus: **Functionality, Quality & Integration**.
• 13 pages of questions: very detailed in all sections.
• Evaluations:
  – EUR: 2 countries evaluated
  – WPR: 1 country: self assessment
  – CDC: planned evaluation 3 countries, 3 regions
  – AMR: 1 country evaluated – Spanish check list

Some used NITAG Tool; others simplified

• Look also for opportunities evaluations - as part EPI country review; GAVI Joint Appraisals.
• Not costly – need training.
• Lead- needs to be aware NITAG work NOT just expertise in evaluation.

*Caveat- whatever tool, format, need formal reporting & debrief*
Global NITAG Network-GNN

**Successes**

GNN- founded in 2016 -26 countries attended

Many NITAGs keen on concept

Roles:

- share lessons learned
- regional “leaders” help locally
- share documents
- Opportunities shared learning & training; NITAG evaluations

Should not:

- increase burden on NITAG
- mean others drive country’s immunization agenda

Agreement on values and governance

**Challenges**

Secretariat

will fail without a secretariat

- AMP-HPID organized 1st meeting

  *lack of dedicated $\&$ and support for GNN

Need creative solution(s):

- Avoid each country pay as may preclude participation
- Yet need buy in and support from countries
- Consider multi layer strategy – size, income level, rotating “scholarships”, twining, grouping ,etc ...
Challenges and Potential Solutions-1

Great progress since 2010 – to achieve goal must
a) address outliers: 124 have NITAG, 79 meet 6 indicators
b) strengthen NITAGs so high function, quality work & integration

1. Address Outliers
   a) Small states: = 1/3 no NITAG
      sub-regional NITAGs
      link to country with established NITAG
      
      determine best practice for context differences
      evaluation of integration of recommendations at country level

b) LMIC no NITAG but not a small state
   Need assessment of barriers esp MIC and push forward

c) HIC no NITAG
   Assessment to see if evidence based vaccine and program decisions – is their “NITAG” functionality, quality and integration?
Challenges and Potential Solutions

2. Enhance NITAG functionality, quality, integration

**Functionality:**

a) Lack of NITAG work plans and agendas
   - *highlight NRC tool*
   - *emphasize partners & countries need to know what priority topics to support*

b) Addressing/managing conflicts of interest
   - *Highlight Best practices/SOP*
     also address
     - Impact culture and history
     - Reporting and transparency: Manage COI*
   - *Develop*
     - *training modules*
     - *self assessments*
   - *Share lessons learned across region - RTAGs, globally – GNN*

*see NRC*
Challenges and Potential Solutions-3

2. Enhance NITAG function, quality, integration

Quality & Integration

a) Training

Highlight NRC materials /training
Newly formed NITAGs,
New NITAG members
Evidence –based review processes

Practicalities when evidence not fit context; no quality local VPD data

NITAG evaluators

Develop training modules

b) Lack of resources

Expertise
Skills
Context data – VPD, vaccines

Need diversification; sharing skills, tools, resources; more collaborations

Develop Regional NITAG mentors- GNN, RTAGs

c) Language issues and access to publications/evidence

e.g. in > 900 item NRC library –

develop process to identify which key documents should be translated and evaluate impact/usefulness
d) Recognition of NITAG by MOH

*i-Document Best Practices*

Best practices on reporting & integrating into gov’t decision making; impact/usefulness

How WHO can help.

What WHO HQ, Regional Offices, partners can do.

How one country’s NITAGs build on successes of another country’s NITAG

**ii-Document NITAG costs & budgets HIC, MIC, LIC: Best Practices**
e) Lack leadership from donor perspective

- Demonstration of benefit of NITAGs in short and longer term needed –key importance quality evidence based recommendations that fit country's context and health system - and what happens if no NITAG........
- Grow understanding difference support NITAG vs. only vaccine support
- Value of tools, resources, cross NITAG(s) collaborations, NRC, RTAGs, GNN and sharing to enhance NITAG quality, integration NIP strength

*Need a global agreement for the national governance of NIP and NITAGs so that global and regional partners operate in a coordinated way.*
Challenges and Potential Solutions-6

Quality & Integration cont’d

f) NITAG assessments and integration of these into other assessment such as EPI reviews

- Need to ensure cover NITAG Functionality, Quality, Integration
- Help grow understanding importance and impact of NITAGs
- Share lessons learned via RTAGs, GNN & esp to countries and partners

g) Support for Secretariat to support NITAGS esp NRC, GNN

- Organize/prioritize NRC work
- Support GNN
- Develop training modules
- Share lessons learned and best practices in different settings, contexts
- Showcase benefits of NITAGs and struggles without
- Celebrate successes
- Grow partner understanding
Key Conclusions

• Support for NITAGs- must be based on *listening, context, culture, sharing and collaboration* – NOT a simple concept – no simple fix- not one size fits all

• Need to grow countries’ and partners’
  – understanding importance of role NITAGs play;
  – ownership and support

• Need to focus on **gaps in NITAGs**
  - Small states
  - LMIC – not small state
  - HIC no NITAG & EBD gap
Key Recommendations

• Growing and enhancing NITAG function, quality and integration:
  - tools, training, advocacy, sharing, regional NITAG mentors, partners
  - tailoring based upon listening and needs
  - support NITAG evaluations

• Grow inter-country, regional and global NITAG collaboration through NRC, RTAGs, GNN

• NRC, GNN need continuous funding/secretariat support

All must be done in tailored fashion - based upon listening and needs