SUPPORTING POLIO TRANSITION IN COUNTRIES AND GLOBALLY: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY
STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING SUMMARY
Montreux, Switzerland, 13-14 November 2018

Background - The World Health Assembly was presented with a Strategic Action Plan on Polio Transition in May 2018. The plan identifies the capacities and assets, especially at the country level, that are required to maintain a polio-free world after eradication and to sustain progress in other programmatic areas that might be compromised by the scale-down of polio eradication infrastructure. The Strategic Action Plan, with accompanying roadmap, is budgeted at USD 667 million within the WHO general program of work (GPW), which includes 2019 and the two biennia 2020-2021 and 2022-2023. As part of its commitments under the action plan, the WHO convened a meeting of key polio stakeholders in Montreux, Switzerland on 13-14 November 2018, to review implementation of the plan and discuss possible future governance options.

Update – For the 16 countries that are global priorities for transition, 7 have endorsed a national polio transition plan. WHO is organizing joint country visits to help finalize transition plans and to engage governments and partners to find sustainable funding. A high-level Steering Committee, chaired by Deputy Director-General Swaminathan, has been established in WHO to oversee the process, and a dedicated Transition team has been appointed to support the process. Since the adoption of the Strategic Action Plan, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) has been extended for a 5-year period. The budget allocated for the GPEI extension 2019-2023 is USD 4.3 billion; 3.7 billion of this total has yet to be mobilized.

Meeting objectives – As the first of a series of stakeholder meetings planned to guide polio transition, the meeting’s objectives included: clarifying the implications on polio transition of the new 5-year GPEI Strategy; identifying existing and potential financing options for polio transition; evaluating ways of achieving a smooth transition; and discussing options for governance of the polio transition and post-certification process.

Summary - WHO provided updates on the latest epidemiological developments, the new GPEI strategy and transition progress. The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) presented an overview of its collaboration with GPEI and the importance polio transition’s potential contribution to the strengthening of routine immunization – a theme also explored further by UNICEF and WHO. Participants had in-depth discussions on four thematic priorities of polio transition: integrated vaccine-preventable disease surveillance; outbreak emergency response, strengthening essential immunization, poliovirus containment and options for future governance.

Conclusions - Stakeholders in the meeting agreed that:
- Transition action must keep a clear focus on the country level;
- While transition priority countries have progressed well in transition planning, funding to sustain polio assets remains a problem for many fragile or low-resource countries;
- The GPEI extension gives breathing space to implement transition more strategically, but cannot be taken as an opportunity to let up on efforts to transition polio assets;
- In endemic countries, transition must not detract from eradication; however, light framework planning in endemic countries can help kick-start transition once polio is eradicated;
• Transition planning can not only strengthen eradication efforts, but can also make an important contribution to strengthening health systems and building emergency response capacity;
• GAVI is committed to support polio transition in eligible countries based on national transition plans, including a time frame to transfer financial responsibility to sustainable funding sources (domestic and international);
• Transition support must take into account the differences between countries’ situations and capacities. Countries fall within three broad categories:
  ✓ Highly vulnerable, fragile/conflict-affected countries, where some progress with transition planning may be possible, but continued technical and financial support will be required in the medium to long term;
  ✓ Lower risk countries, where a faster pace is possible for transitioning capacity-building support, to enhance routine immunization and emergency response capability;
  ✓ Countries with stronger health systems, with a sufficiently large trained workforce and stronger economic capabilities; these governments will gradually be able to fully integrate and fund the polio assets and capacities needed to meet their health priorities;
• There is a need for more high-level political advocacy on the important opportunity that transition offers for helping achieve broader global health initiatives, including the Sustainable Development Goals, Global Health Security and Universal Health Coverage;
• There are several options for the future governance of polio transition, and further consideration is needed before decisions are made in the appropriate fora on this issue;
• There is a need to accelerate discussions on the pragmatic implication of polio transition, particularly at country level, across three of the four thematic priorities of integrated vaccine-preventable disease surveillance, strengthening essential immunization, and outbreak emergency response, and to discuss the WHO internal transition of the poliovirus containment programme into the appropriate department in order to ensure its long-term sustainability.

Follow-up action - WHO has committed to:
• Take the lead to convene follow-up discussions in the coming months on the pragmatic implications of polio transition, across the four thematic priorities identified, to support decision-making in those areas;
• Organize discussions on governance at the next polio key stakeholder consultations, which will be held prior to the 2019 World Health Assembly;
• Make contributions to the GPEI Strategy design;
• Work closely with GPEI on detailed analyses of country transition budgets to ensure there is no overlap or duplication between GPEI and WHO transition budgets;
• Continue to organize joint country visits to review national transition plans to ensure that they meet the objectives of the WHO strategic action plan.