

National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) Establishment & Sustainability

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

Noni MacDonald, Dalhousie University, Canada;

Abigail Shefer, CDC, USA;

Kathy Cavallaro, CDC, USA

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

Across Regions- Challenges: **Functionality**

NITAG's structure and operations foster the timely generation of recommendations

No formal TOR, training, agendas, annual work plans etc

***Small states (popⁿ <1M)
- national NITAG not viable option***

Lack secretariat and/or of too limited expertise*

Lack gov't commitment and understanding

NITAGs exist but not meet 6 indicators

Insufficient and/or non-sustainable funding & resources from gov't for ongoing support NITAG

Political instability and/or civil strife preclude NITAG's functioning

* 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



World Health
Organization

BILL & MELINDA
GATES *foundation*



HQ, Regional Offices, Country
Offices

amhpid

HEALTH POLICY AND
INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



WHO COLLABORATING CENTRE
FOR EVIDENCE-INFORMED
IMMUNIZATION POLICYMAKING



LONDON
SCHOOL of
HYGIENE
& TROPICAL
MEDICINE



ROBERT KOCH INSTITUT



WEST AFRICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION



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.

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

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

Challenges and Potential Solutions-4

Quality & Integration cont'd

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

Challenges and Potential Solutions-5

Quality & Integration cont'd

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*