National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)
Role and Mandate
Support and partnership in African Region
Outline

- NITAG Mandate
- Global framework
- Status of NITAG Establishment in AFRO NITAG Basic functional indicators
- NITAG Basic functional indicators and functionality in WHO African Region
- Opportunity & Key challenges
- Way forward for nitags strengthening
What is a NITAG?

- A body of **national experts** that provide **technical** and **scientific** guidance to the government (the MoH and/or the EPI) on immunization policy, norms, and practices.

- An **independent** scientific advisory group.
  - MoH officials/NIP specialists should **not** be **core** members. Rather should serve as **ex-officio** members.

NITAG mandate

- Conduct the best possible review of scientific evidence
- Bring credibility through expertise, minimize pressure from outside interest groups, and eliminate real or apparent personal conflicts of interest
- Provide timely, evidence-based recommendations on vaccine policy
NITAG mandate

- Create **standards** for vaccination schedules, vaccine procurement and storage, routes of administration, dosing, and contraindications.
- Review and provide **recommendations to improve NIP policies**, including data collection, quality of services provided, and vaccination coverage.
- Vaccine impact: **Advise on the monitoring of the impact** of technical recommendations including vaccine effectiveness and impact.
- VPD vaccine preventable diseases surveillance: **Support the creation of standards for surveillance of VPDs, and standard operating procedures and protocols** for disease reporting and specimen collection.
- VPD vaccine preventable diseases elimination: **Support an independent process to document and verify evidence during the stages of VPD elimination**, e.g., measles, rubella, congenital rubella syndrome.
- Anticipation of the **National Immunization Programme’s needs**: Monitor trends in VPDs, identify research gaps and guide the NIP in leveraging existing resources or creating partnerships to address the identified needs. Review the progress in the development of new vaccines and the potential for their inclusion into the NIP.
### NITAG versus ICC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>ICC</th>
<th>NITAG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
<td>Implementing body, mandated for operational coordination, financial resources management and fund-raising.</td>
<td>Gather, generate, and analyze evidence on all VPDs for policy and programme decisions.</td>
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<td><strong>Target</strong></td>
<td>Mainly EPI-focused, may be extended to child health.</td>
<td>All vaccines and immunization topics including for adults, adolescents, and special groups.</td>
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<td><strong>Membership</strong></td>
<td>Minister of Health is often the chair. Members from MOH departments, technical, and donor agencies.</td>
<td>MOH represented by the EPI Manager. National experts from technical and scientific disciplines related to VPDs and immunization.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role in decisions</strong></td>
<td>Executive role, makes decisions.</td>
<td>Consultative role (does not make decisions). Issue technical recommendations (advice) to national authorities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>A coordination body.</td>
<td>Not a coordination, regulation, or implementation body.</td>
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NITAGs composition and functioning
WHO 3-level Immunization Policy Framework

NITAGs as key player and end users

- **National** Policies and Strategies
- **Prioritize** problems and define optimal solutions
- **Monitor national** programme and impact

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- **NITAG**
  - National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization

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- **RTAG**
  - Regional Technical Advisory Group on Immunization
  - Regional policies & strategies
  - Identify and set regional priorities
  - Monitor regional progress

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- **SAGE**
  - Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization
  - Global policy recommendations and strategies
  - Support regional/ national challenges

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- **WHO Technical Advisory Committees**

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**National**

**Regional**

**Global**
Tailored country support, coordinated through WHO and UNICEF regional offices, and leveraging national and regional technical advisory groups (e.g. NITAGs, RITAGs) will build upon guidance from SAGE to help ministries of health prioritize.

## Framework for Action (immunizationagenda2030.org)

### COUNTRY IMPLEMENTATION OF IA2030

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>To achieve and sustain national and regional immunization goals &amp; targets</th>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiated IA2030 Priorities</td>
<td>According to country context (e.g., coverage &amp; equity, hesitancy, integration of services, outbreaks, quality assured vaccine supply, sustainability)</td>
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<td>Advocacy &amp; Communications</td>
<td>National communication and advocacy platforms</td>
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**Tools & Structures**

- **Coordinated Operational Planning**
  - National Health Strategy
  - National Immunization Strategy
  - Prioritized operational plans informed by experts (e.g., NITAGs, RITAGs, SAGE)

- **Monitoring & Evaluation**
  - IA2030 IG indicators, Global and Regional SP Objective indicators, and additional SP Objective indicators selected by countries tailored to needs and context
  - Scorecards or dashboards to measure national/subnational & partner/CSO progress
  - Monitoring frameworks (e.g., National Health Observatory, WHO-UNICEF JRF)

- **Ownership & Accountability**
  - WHA representation
  - Regional Committee representation
  - NITAGs
  - ICCS/ HSCCs
  - Civil Society platforms

**Processes**

- Coordination through country structures with inclusion of CSOs (e.g. Stakeholder engagement groups, Gavi Joint Appraisal process, Health Sector Coordinating Committee)
- Monitoring, evaluation and action cycles (including effective feedback loops) at all levels:
  - Monitor: measure and review IA2030 indicator data on a regular basis
  - Evaluate: assess progress using tailored indicator scorecards and identify potential root causes of success and failure
  - Act: recommend actions for implementation, resource allocation and policy development

- Processes to increase accountability of government, partners & CSOs (e.g., Joint Appraisal in Gavi countries, National Accountability Frameworks)
- Routine opportunities for consultative engagement organized by Working Groups
NITAG established in 42 WHO African countries, (as of June 2023)
Indicators monitored annually by WHO

1. Legal or administrative basis
2. Formal terms of reference
3. Disclosure of interests
4. 5 areas of expertise
5. One meeting a year
6. Agenda circulated one week before meeting

*These indicators do not guarantee the functionality of the NITAG but are the minimum set of indicators to monitor progress at the global level.

*More in-depth performance evaluation tools for review of NITAGs process, functionality and output are available.
30 countries in African region met the 6 basic criteria in 2022; 72% of the population covered by a functional NITAG.

Source: eJRF 2022
NITAGs Maturity level for the 7 indicators in 5 AFR countries

- Establishment and Composition
- Independence and non Bias
- Resources and Secretariat support
- Operations
- Making Recommendations
- Integration in Policymaking Process
- Stakeholders recognition
- All Indicators

Countries: Ethiopia, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Tanzania
Opportunities & Perspectives

**Multi Partner support synergizing efforts**

TFGH, CDC, WAHOO, NISH for Capacity building and EIDM

Financial support (GAVI, CDC, WAHOO, WHO, Data Gathering: support of the librarian through the NISH help desk

**Assessment of NITAGs to identify improvement actions and pro-actively addressing support needed from partners**

**Formalize the networking**
NISH support package to NITAG’s

- HS: Health Systems
- EIDM: Evidence Informed Decision Making
- HE: Health Economics
- MM: Mathematical Modelling
- DT: Design Thinking

Complements
- Webinars
- Library guides
- EGMs
- Helpdesk
- Research stays
- Research
1st Annual Vaccinology Course for NITAGs
22-29 July 2022

2nd Annual Vaccinology Course for NITAGs
03 to 07 July, 2023

- 35 NITAGs members
  - Benin
  - Liberia
  - Burundi
  - Botswana
  - Eswatini
  - Ethiopia

- 34 NITAGs members:
  - Madagascar
  - Sierra Leone
  - Niger
  - Kenya
  - Angola

- NITAG mode of Functioning and EtR training conducted for NITAG in:
  - Gambia (dec 21);
  - Ghana (july 21);
  - Burkina Faso (2022);
  - (Benin, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Congo) in Cotonou (may 2023)

- External assessment 12 countries, november 2021 (WAHO, WHO)
- SAGE attendance
- AFRO, NISH and GNN digest, Webinars on topics of interest
- External assessment using the NITAG maturity assessment tool (NMAT) in Burkina Faso, Algeria
Challenges

Limited expansion of NITAGs membership in certain domains: health economics, social sciences, Immunologist, modelling.

Sub-optimal support from secretariat

Funding of NITAGs highly dependent on partners

Lack of reliable local data availability

Insufficient visibility of NITAGs versus their importance in the decision making process
Ways forward for NITAG’s strengthening in the AFR region

- Involvement of NITAG in the National Immunization strategic planning process and monitoring the implementation
- NITAG workplan fully integrated in the to be in National Immunization Strategic plan for dedicated resources allocation (financial)
- Strengthen the NITAG secretariat for efficient implementation of NITAG workplan
- Promote the use of NITAG Maturity assessment tool (NMAT) to guide improvement
- Capacity strengthening of NITAGs through vaccinology, GNN, experience sharing
- Advocate with Senior management of the MOH on the role of NITAGs and their benefits
- Create visibility of NITAG within country (Web page etc…) to show case their work
- Setting an African NITAGs Network to strengthen experience sharing and peer to peer learning
Thanks Merci Obrigado