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POLIOMYELITIS IN THE AFRICAN REGION: PROGRESS REPORT

Information Document

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BACKGROUND

1. The African Region remains committed to poliomyelitis eradication. In September 2013, the Sixty-third session of the Regional Committee for Africa discussed the Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan 2013–2018 whose objectives are: (a) detection and interruption of poliovirus transmission; (b) strengthening of immunization systems and withdrawal of oral polio vaccine (OPV); (c) poliovirus containment and certification; and (d) development of a comprehensive legacy plan.

2. In May 2015, the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly passed a resolution¹ to ensure interruption of WPV transmission; achieve and maintain certification standard surveillance; introduce inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) before the global withdrawal of the type -2 component of the trivalent OPV in April 2016; and ensure that polio assets, lessons learnt and knowledge acquired are applied to support other national health priorities. At the 25th African Union (AU) Summit in June 2015, African Heads of States declared polio eradication to be a “historical legacy for future generations”.

3. This report documents the progress made in polio eradication, presents the implementation status of the Polio Eradication Endgame Strategic Plan 2013–2018, and proposes the next steps towards achievement of the objectives and milestones of the plan.

PROGRESS MADE

4. On 25 September 2015, Nigeria, the only remaining polio-endemic country in Africa, was removed from the list of polio-endemic countries after more than a year of zero confirmed cases of wild poliovirus. Also, the polio outbreaks that occurred in Cameroon, Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea in 2014 were declared to have been successfully interrupted. There has been no confirmed wild poliovirus in the African Region in 2015. Acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance for detecting poliovirus improved in 2015 compared to 2014. In addition, environmental surveillance to complement AFP surveillance was expanded to Chad and Madagascar in 2015.

5. The six polio focus countries² in the region were supported to strengthen routine immunization. Three of the six focus countries (Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria) increased their DPT3 coverage from 2013 to 2014. As of 17 August 2015, fourteen countries³ had introduced IPV in their routine immunization schedule to boost population immunity.

6. On 20 September 2015, the Global Commission for Certification (GCC) of Polio Eradication declared that wild poliovirus type 2 had been eradicated globally. Twelve⁴ countries had conducted laboratory survey and inventory activities for laboratory containment of polioviruses type -2.

7. The AFRO inter-cluster polio legacy planning committee commenced working in close collaboration with the global polio legacy committee, partners and donor agencies to support the legacy

¹ World Health assembly, Document A68/21/ Add1 – 15 May 2015.

² Angola, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Sudan.

³ Benin, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Madagascar, Republic of Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles and South Africa.

⁴ Botswana, Congo, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

planning processes. Additionally, eight countries with the largest amounts of polio assets have completed documentation of the best practices that will be used for other public health interventions.

8. Despite the progress made, Africa can only be certified polio-free in 2017 if the current momentum is sustained. Several countries⁵ in the African Region experienced circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV) outbreaks and isolated VDPVs in 2015. Insecurity continued to pose a threat to the full implementation of polio eradication activities. The continued Ebola outbreak in West Africa also hampered the implementation of planned polio eradication activities. With the interruption of wild poliovirus transmission in the African Region, the process of transitioning polio-funded infrastructure to benefit other public health interventions will be initiated.

NEXT STEPS

9. In line with the Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan 2013–2018 and the mid-term review of the plan in 2015, the following actions are being proposed to Member States in the African Region for implementation with the support of partners:

- (a) Strengthen detection of any poliovirus transmission, respond quickly to a poliovirus outbreak, and improve the quality of supplemental immunization activities.
- (b) Strengthen routine immunization systems and accelerate inactivated polio vaccine introduction in line with the global withdrawal of the type-2 component of the trivalent oral polio vaccine.
- (c) Accelerate implementation of certification and containment activities to meet the global milestones for eradication.
- (d) In consultation with partners, accelerate implementation of the polio legacy planning and transitioning of polio assets for other public health interventions and health systems strengthening.
- (e) Mobilize adequate resources to fully implement polio eradication activities and sustain the gains in the African Region.

⁵ Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Guinea, Madagascar, Nigeria and South Sudan.