Development of a harmonized approach to assessment of TB surveillance data and strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems: recent joint efforts and next steps planned by the Global Fund and WHO

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I.

Background

There has been growing recognition of the need to strengthen and align national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to assess improvements in health outcomes, both among national governments and international agencies. The use of results-based financing mechanisms by major global donors, including the Global Fund has created further demand for timely and reliable data for decision-making. This is even more critical in the coming years when countries are trying to measure progress in the context of the health-related targets included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The WHO Global Task Force on TB Impact Measurement (hereinafter referred to as the Task Force) and the Global Fund have a shared interest in and commitment to improving surveillance systems, assessing the quality and coverage of surveillance data and measuring the impact of TB control efforts on TB incidence, prevalence and mortality. The WHO and the Global Fund in collaboration with Stop TB partners have been involved in strengthening TB monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems - including development of frameworks, standards, tools and methods to assess quality of surveillance data, surveillance systems and disease burden.

In pursuance of the shared agenda, the Taskforce and the Global Fund have developed a joint work programme for 2010-11 to harmonize efforts for strengthening TB M&E systems. These efforts are expected to improve estimates of the Global disease burden, monitor progress towards TB related MDGs, and assessment of progress towards targets for results-based funded programmes, and evaluation of large-scale programmes.
This paper outlines the activities initiated by the Taskforce and the Global Fund to harmonize the approaches for strengthening TB M&E and surveillance systems and data quality assessments. This is expected to benefit all national stakeholders and Stop TB Partners involved with global efforts to strengthen TB M&E systems.

II. The WHO-Global Fund Joint Work programme

A Global Fund / WHO TB M&E joint team on impact measurement was formed in June 2009 to pursue a common approach to:

1. Strengthening of TB surveillance systems at country level through systematic analysis and interpretation of surveillance data, including assessment of data quality, using standardized methods, towards the ultimate goal of measuring TB cases and deaths directly from notification and vital registration data;
2. Ensuring the implementation of surveys of the prevalence of TB disease in countries where these are recommended, with particular attention to 21 global focus countries;

Five principal activities will be undertaken as part of the Joint Work programme:

1. Global coordination for the Joint Work Programme
   a. The Task Force and the Global Fund M&E team would work closely through ‘Weekly Meetings of the Joint TB M&E Team’ to jointly work, coordinate and monitor all activities identified in the Joint Work programme
   b. Participate and contribute to the work of the Task Force

2. Strengthening TB surveillance systems linked to updated estimates of disease burden
   a. Adapt existing data quality assessment tools and develop a common set of methods and related tools to implement Task Force framework for assessment of surveillance data (Figure 1). The tools and methods would facilitate assessment of quality and completeness of surveillance data, explore extent to which surveillance systems capture all cases and deaths, to measure trends (and impact), and develop country specific recommendations on how to strengthen surveillance systems. These processes would contribute to measures
that would meet standards required for certification (M and E strengthening and data quality assessment)

Figure 1: Framework for assessment of TB Surveillance data

b. Conduct regional workshops in which common set of methods are applied. The intended outcome of the workshops is to build capacity at national level to analyze and use surveillance data; with clear recommendations on how to strengthen surveillance that can be implemented via Global Fund grants. This exercise would contribute to improved understanding of trends and impact; updated estimates of TB burden (incidence, prevalence, mortality), used by both WHO and Global Fund and endorsed by countries.

3. **Support to countries where prevalence surveys are recommended**

   a. Work closely with countries, WHO and technical partners in the 21 high focus countries to facilitate mobilization of resources for the conduct of TB prevalence surveys. As most of the national prevalence surveys are being supported through Global Fund grants, the joint work team shall work together to address bottlenecks in their implementation.

*Source: Task Force on TB Impact Measurement policy paper - 2009*
b. Global-level workshops with global focus countries to ensure standardization of survey methods, share experience, resolve bottlenecks, maintain momentum, build Asia-Africa partnership/collaboration
   • Workshop for global focus countries on data management/analysis, focusing on African countries

4. **Strengthening performance-based funding and assessment of the contribution of the Global Fund to reductions in disease burden**
   a. Common Approach: Develop and implement a common framework and set of methods for reviewing TB grants, including outcome and impact measurement, consistent with the common methods/tools
   b. TB Indicator and Targets Review: Expert review of the programme indicators and targets currently used in TB grants with special focus on quality, outcome and impact, to recommend measures for strengthening TB grant management approaches.
   c. Impact Measurement: Review the design and methodology and strengthen approaches for analysis of the impact and progress towards TB related MDGs in 22 HBCs being supported through Global Fund grants.

5. **Contribute to the preparation and dissemination of Global TB control report**
   a. To harmonize WHO and Global Fund data collection and reporting cycles with in-country cycles to ensure full comparability of data published in the Global TB report with data in the Global Fund reports to be published in 2010-11.
   b. The Global Fund M&E Team would work closely with the WHO-M&E team and provide inputs towards review, and analysis of the TB surveillance data

III. **Update on activities initiated**

As a follow-up to the development of the Joint Work Programme, several activities have been initiated. The weekly joint team meeting has been instrumental in sharing and reviewing progress on the work of the TB Impact Assessment Taskforce. The major activities initiated are enlisted below:

- **Supporting TB Prevalence Surveys**
  - Sensitization meeting with Fund Portfolio Managers (FPM) on TB Prevalence Surveys
- Participation in Meeting on prevalence surveys in African countries, WHO HQ, Geneva, 15-16 October 2009 to discuss progress and address bottlenecks in the conduct of surveys
- On-going support to countries and FPMs at the Global Fund to address funding bottlenecks

- Harmonizing tools for assessment of quality of surveillance data - A one-day meeting including participants from relevant teams in WHO and the Global Fund was held on 10 February to share information about the broader context in which M&E efforts are being undertaken; share information about the M&E and data quality assessment tools being used; discuss how to harmonize the tools; and discuss how to implement the harmonized approach. The key outcomes of the meeting are:
  - Harmonize the M&E Systems assessment tool with the WHO “workbook” to assess completeness, consistency and quality of surveillance data
  - Harmonize and simplify Routine Data Quality Assessment and On-Site data verification tools for routine use by NTP/field supervisors.
  - Test out the harmonized package of tools in 3-5 countries, with a view to further roll-out if successful

  For more details see background paper number 3.

- Review of TB Indicators used in performance evaluation frameworks
  - Expert review of the programme indicators and targets currently used in TB grants with special focus on quality, outcome and impact was undertaken.
    - The review called for de-emphasizing the reliance on the current TB outcome and impact indicators in on-going performance assessment and disbursement/funding decisions and called for development of new set of TB outcome and impact indicators that are directly measurable (e.g. for impact: after formal certification of surveillance data, the trend in notification rates as a proxy for impact on incidence; e.g. for outcome: notification rate and treatment success rate).
    - The review emphasized the need to strengthen the performance assessment at funding decisions with (1) relevant contextual programmatic (best obtained from the most recent NTP external review) and epidemiological
(best obtained from the most recent annual surveillance report) information and (2) a sound (may be independent) technical assessment of overall performance. This contextual, epidemiological and technical assessment has to answer the question: “Is this a good or under-performing grant within a good or under-performing TB program?”.

- A small technical working group under the leadership of the Task Force to be convened to provide recommendations on the indicators that should be included in the performance evaluation frameworks used by the Global Fund to monitor grants and make decisions on funding;

IV. Next Steps

- On-going support to countries for carrying out of TB prevalence surveys as planned
- Harmonize tools currently being used by WHO and The Global Fund for assessment of TB M&E systems and quality of surveillance data.
- Test out the harmonized tools in countries and through regional workshops for further refining and rolling out
- Technical working group to review and identify new set of TB outcome and impact indicators that are directly measurable and can be used in grant performance evaluations