

Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Malaria Elimination Certification Panel

13–14 December 2017
World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

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ABBREVIATIONS

GMP	Global Malaria Programme
MECP	Malaria Elimination Certification Panel
MPAC	Malaria Policy Advisory Committee
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 13–14 December 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) convened the Malaria Elimination Certification Panel (MECP) for its first meeting to review and discuss two draft guides on certification, the internal operating procedures for the MECP and the expected certification plan for 2018.

- WHO (specifically the Global Malaria Programme [GMP] and the Regional Offices) is responsible for providing technical assistance to countries to help them prepare for certification.
- The Panel reviewed and made recommendations for improvements to two draft guides on certification: one for countries applying for certification, and the second for the panel conducting the certification evaluation. The guides will be piloted during the certification processes for the next two countries to be certified, and then reviewed again by the MECP and published.
- While the documentation needed for certification must include all essential data, the required information should be streamlined and simplified so as not to burden the programme or the country.
- Countries that have not reported an indigenous malaria case for at least 15 years may be granted certification without an evaluation mission as long as their national elimination report is prepared and reviewed by the MECP, and the decision is supported by all available evidence, the Regional Offices and the MECP.
- The first priority of certification evaluation missions is to verify the data and findings from national elimination reports and from the national malaria database in order to ensure the completeness, precision and credibility of the data. The competency of general health staff is an important indicator of the quality of curative and preventive services and should be a key factor assessed during field visits.
- The name of the “Supplementary list of countries in which malaria never existed or disappeared without specific measures” should be changed to: “Countries that are malaria-free but not certified by WHO,” while the other list should be named: “Official register of countries certified as malaria-free by WHO.”
- The MECP should be the body within WHO that recommends decertification of a country to the Director-General (through the Malaria Policy Advisory Committee [MPAC]) based on the criteria outlined in the *Framework*. The process for decertification should be similar to the process for certification, with an evaluation mission and review of the report generated by the evaluation team.

BACKGROUND

The 13th World Health Assembly in 1960 requested "the Director-General to establish an official register listing areas where malaria eradication has been achieved, after inspection and certification by a WHO evaluation team." WHO updated the prerequisites and processes for certification of national malaria elimination in 2017 in the *Framework for malaria elimination*. In line with the new elimination framework and following the recommendation of the MPAC, the MECP has been constituted. The MECP is charged with recommending to WHO GMP whether malaria elimination can be certified in applicant countries based on WHO criteria, including the guidance contained in the *Framework*. Two guides on the certification of malaria elimination have been drafted: one is to support countries to prepare for certification and the other is to guide the certification activities of the MECP and WHO.

INTRODUCTION AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The first meeting of the MECP was held on 13–14 December 2017 in Geneva. Over the course of the two-day meeting, 10 members, two regional advisers, one observer, and the WHO Secretariat discussed the content and structure of the two guides, the internal operating procedures of the MECP and the timeline for certifications in 2018 based on current and expected requests from malaria-free countries (see Annex 1 for the meeting agenda). All members of the MECP attended the meeting with the exception of J. Puello. A list of participants is provided in Annex 2.

All MECP members participating in the meeting submitted a declaration of interests that was assessed by the Elimination Unit, GMP at WHO. None of the members of the MECP were found to have conflicts of interest related to the topics under discussion.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the meeting was to review and finalize the two practical guides on WHO certification of malaria elimination, and to agree on the MECP internal operating procedures.

Specific objectives

To review and finalize the two practical guides on WHO certification of malaria elimination, including:

- Guidance on drafting a national elimination report;
- The standard operating procedures for certification, including methodology for field assessment;
- Guidance on drafting a certification evaluation report;
- Guidance on establishing a national malaria elimination database.

PROCESS AND PRESENTATIONS

Background documents

In preparation for the meeting, WHO prepared drafts of two practical guides.

Presentations

Presentations, followed by brief discussions, were made by K. Lindblade (WHO, Geneva, Switzerland), D. Sankara (WHO, Geneva, Switzerland), Li Xiao H. (WHO, Geneva, Switzerland) and K. Anatoly (Martinovski Institute of Medical Parasitology and Tropical Medicine). After the presentations were completed, the panel reviewed the two practical guides in depth and provided comments and recommendations for improvements.

Lessons learned from dracunculiasis eradication certification, presented by D. Sankara, included: i) WHO should start working with countries before they request certification in order to improve the quality of national data and improve familiarity with the country, thus making certification easier. ii) The certification report should not be too brief or too lengthy. iii) The size of the certification evaluation mission should depend on the size of the country, but resources must also be considered. iv) Countries with no indigenous cases or local transmission for a long period of time that request certification might only need to submit a national report and forgo a certification evaluation mission.

Li Xiao H. presented on the history of WHO certification of malaria elimination, the evolution of the criteria and processes, lessons learned from the official register and supplementary lists, and countries that submitted requests but were not certified. The lesson learned from this review included the importance of ensuring fairness, transparency and consistency in the certification process. Further elaboration of the criteria established is a way to further improve the quality of certification.

During the subsequent discussions, GMP clarified that, although WHO encourages countries to request certification once they are eligible to do so, national governments have the choice as to whether or not they want to request certification. There was a discussion on the possibility of certifying as malaria-free a WHO region in which some countries had not gone through the formal certification process (e.g., the European region). While the panel considered regional certification a potential option, more discussion is required to ensure that regional certification would provide adequate verification of malaria transmission interruption within the region.

Activities and experiences from certification missions in Armenia, United Arab Emirates, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan were presented by A. Kondrashin. During the discussion, panel members felt that there should be a balance between time spent on meetings with the central ministry of health and field visits. Assessing whether health personnel are conversant with the diagnosis and treatment of malaria is a critical component of field visits to peripheral areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESULTING FROM THE REVIEW OF THE PRACTICAL GUIDES

Although the criteria for the certification of malaria elimination were established in the 1960s and 70s, and the procedure was published by WHO, countries perceive the certification process to be difficult and hard to complete. The two guides on certification are meant to clarify the existing guidance, not to establish new guidelines. The guide for countries is expected to support countries in preparing for certification, while the handbook is meant to guide and assist MECP members and

WHO in conducting certification assessment activities, with a focus on the certification evaluation mission.

During the discussion, MECP members supported the development of two guides (i.e., instead of combining them into a single document), given that the guides serve different purposes and target audiences. The guide for countries should include some examples of best practices or innovative ideas on how countries could prepare for certification (e.g., establishment of a certification committee).

Main recommendations on the guide for countries

- Requirements for documentation should be as simple as possible, while ensuring essential data and information are retained, so as not to burden the programme or the country.
- The national elimination report should follow the outline in Annex 6 of the *Framework for malaria elimination*, but more detailed instructions should be provided for each section.
- The national elimination report may include three major sections: the past (history) of malaria in the country along with activities undertaken to reduce transmission; recent or current programme activities (including surveillance and other interventions); and plans for the future (i.e., prevention of re-establishment).
- To avoid confusion, the term 'national malaria database' should be used instead of 'national malaria elimination database.' More details should be given on the structure and contents of the case register. If countries had already eliminated malaria before the launch of the *Framework* in 2017 and never maintained a focus register, they are exempt from this requirement.
- Surveillance reports should go back 10 years from the time of evaluation.

Main recommendations on the handbook for the MECP and WHO

- WHO (both the GMP and the Regional Offices) is responsible for providing technical assistance to countries to help them prepare for certification.
- **Countries that can be certified without an evaluation mission:** Countries that have not reported an indigenous malaria case for at least 15 years may be granted certification without an evaluation mission as long as their national elimination report is prepared and reviewed by the MECP, and the decision is supported by all available evidence, the Regional Offices and the MECP.
- Given the time limit of a certification evaluation mission and the volume of documents to be reviewed, the focus on reviewing and checking documents should be narrowed down. The first priority is to verify data and findings from national elimination reports and from the national malaria database in order to ensure the completeness, precision and credibility of the data. The competency of general health staff is an important indicator of the quality of curative and preventive services and should be a key factor assessed during field visits.
- Some sections could be combined to shorten the length of the document.
- The name of the supplementary list should be changed to: "Countries that are malaria-free but not certified by WHO," while the other list should be named: "Official register of countries certified as malaria-free by WHO."
- The MECP should be the body within WHO that recommends decertification of a country to the Director-General based on the criteria outlined in the *Framework*. The process for

decertification should be similar to the process for certification, with an evaluation mission and review of the report generated by the evaluation team.

- The Terms of Reference of the panel will be revised to include review of the data on prevention of re-establishment

Presentation: Internal operating procedures and certification plan for 2018

- GMP will select team members for each certification mission, in consultation with the MECP chairperson.
- The certification processes for Paraguay, Uzbekistan and Argentina are expected to be completed in 2018, although the timeline for Argentina is currently unclear. Algeria has already submitted an official request. As the agenda for certification in 2018 is full, members are requested to stay in touch with GMP to ensure the timely receipt of important messages related to certification.
- Because the certification of Maldives was conducted using an ad hoc process, the MECP recommends that Maldives submit a national elimination report to the certification panel for review before the country is entered into the official WHO register.

FINAL DISCUSSION

The MECP chair and co-chair were selected. All MECP members were urged to complete their review of the two guides and provide all comments and suggestions by the end of 2018. The guides will be in draft form and piloted over the next two certification missions. The panel will meet again in 2018 to summarize lessons learned and experiences from the missions in order to further improve the two guides and the internal operating procedures.

ANNEX 1. AGENDA

Day 1 – Wednesday 13 December 2017

Morning Session – Trenton Ruebush II, Chair

8:30 – 9:00	Registration	
9:00 – 9:10	Opening remarks	Ren Minghui
9:10 – 9:15	Introductions	
9:15 – 9:20	<i>Group photo</i>	
9:20 – 9:30	Setting the scene for certification of malaria elimination	Pedro Alonso
9:30 – 9:35	Declaration of interests (DOI)	Li Xiao Hong
9:35 – 10:00	Global progress on malaria elimination, the E-2020 Initiative and the technical guidance Discussion (10')	Kim Lindblade
10:00 – 10:10	Meeting purpose and objectives	Kim Lindblade
10:10 – 10:45	Certification of dracunculiasis eradication (20') Discussion (15')	Dieudonne Sankara
10:45 – 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>	
11:00 – 11:40	An overview of WHO certification of malaria elimination – lessons, experiences and updated criteria (20') Discussion (20')	Li Xiao Hong
11:40 – 12:20	Certification missions of malaria elimination – UAE (2007), Turkmenistan (2010), Armenia (2011), Kyrgyzstan (2016) (20') Discussion (20')	Kondrashin Anatoly
12:20 – 12:30	Overview of the generic timeline for certification	Li Xiao Hong
12:30 – 13:30	<i>Lunch</i>	

Afternoon Session – Kondrashin Anatoly, Chair

13:30 – 14:00	An introduction of the guide for countries: Getting ready for WHO certification (15') Discussion (10')	Li Xiao Hong
13:25 – 14:00	Assign group work	Kim Lindblade
14:00 – 15:00	Breakout into work groups	
15:00 – 15:30	<i>Coffee break</i>	
15:30 – 16:30	Continue work group discussion	
16:30 – 17:00	Report back from group discussion - Group 1 - Group 2 Plenary/discussion	Work group Rapporteur
17:00 – 17:30	Summary of Day 1 and close	Kim Lindblade
18:30 – 20:30	<i>Dinner for members at Restaurant Chateau du Penthes</i>	

Day 2 – Thursday 14 December 2017

Morning Session – Rossitza Kurdova, Chair

9:00 – 9:30	A WHO handbook for certification of malaria elimination – an introduction Assign group work Discussion (10')	Li Xiao Hong
9:30 – 10:30	Breakout into work groups	
10:30 – 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>	
11:00 – 12:00	Continue group work	
12:00 – 13:00	Report back from group work - Group 1 - Group 2 Plenary/discussion	Work group Rapporteur
13:00 – 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	

Afternoon Session – Allan Schapira, Chair

14:00 – 15:00	Overview of MECP operating procedures for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recusal for conflicts of interest • Assignment of teams to conduct certification mission • Review of certification evaluation report • Procedures to determine whether MECP supports country's application for certification • Formal recommendations of MECP 	Li Xiao Hong
15:00 – 15:30	<i>Coffee break</i>	

Closed session

15:30 – 16:00	WHO certification of malaria elimination – Work plan of 2018	Li Xiao Hong
16:00 – 16:30	Recap and future steps	Pedro Alonso
16:30	<i>END OF MEETING</i>	

**Please note the agenda is subject to change. You will be notified of any changes.*

ANNEX 2. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Members

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University of Health and Allied Sciences
GHANA

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Director, Institute of Public Health Research of Iran
IRAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF

Dr Anatoly Kondrashin (Co-Chair)
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