Terms of Reference for the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group of Experts (STAGE) on Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health, and Nutrition (MNCAHN)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) provides WHO an opportunity to re-emphasize the importance of focused and committed leadership, sound scientific strategies, and better integrated and coordinated health programming led by national stakeholders to improve the health of their population. Lack of coordinated global leadership contributes to fragmentation, inefficient use of resources, and poor accountability for health, including for maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health. In addition, it has been shown that government ownership and government-led planning and implementation are required to scale up interventions and services. In most cases the evidence for the impact and effectiveness of interventions and delivery strategies is not always systematically generated, captured and integrated into policy and programming. While WHO has a vigorous internal process for developing specific recommendations and guidelines for MNCAHN, there is need for a scientific advisory body to systematically advise on how to translate these recommendations and useful innovations into delivery strategies and how they fit into integrated programming.

A global independent expert advisory group to systematically review evidence and provide strategic guidance with a focus on maximizing country impact and ensure coordinated global leadership and stakeholder accountability would provide great value to the global health community. The core function of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group of Experts (STAGE) would be to provide strategic and technical advice to WHO on matters relating to Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health, and Nutrition global priorities and emerging issues for which policies, strategies, recommendations and intervention packages should be developed or updated, with a view to helping Member States in reaching relevant SDG targets. STAGE’s advice will support the provision of integrated, high-quality primary health care services in the context of universal health coverage, encompassing health promotion, disease prevention and treatment, to ensure that pregnant women, mothers and their newborn, children and adolescents survive and thrive.

The STAGE will act as an advisory body to WHO in this field.

I. Functions

In its capacity as an advisory body to WHO, the STAGE shall have the following functions:

- To review and make recommendations to WHO on broad priority topics for developing or updating WHO guidelines, norms and standards to steer national strategies and policies or to improve their implementation;
• To advise WHO on priority intervention packages and delivery approaches (based on relevant WHO guidelines) for inclusion in the WHO agendas for primary health care and universal health coverage in different epidemiological contexts and health systems;

• To review and make recommendations to WHO on strategies to ensure greater investment for national implementation of context-appropriate intervention packages, innovations and delivery approaches;

• To advise WHO on strategies to improve the effective coverage and quality of implementation of WHO-recommended intervention packages and delivery approaches;

• To advise WHO on innovative mechanisms to enable knowledge translation so that the evidence and guidelines can be more effectively translated into practice at a country and regional level;

• To advise WHO on other topics identified by WHO for which there is no scientific consensus or varied acceptance among countries.

II. Composition

1. The STAGE shall have up to 31 members1, who shall serve in their personal capacities to represent the broad range of disciplines relevant to maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition. In the selection of the STAGE members, consideration shall be given to attaining an adequate distribution of technical expertise, geographical representation and gender balance.

2. Members of the STAGE, including the Chairperson, shall be selected and appointed by WHO following an open call for experts. The Chairperson’s functions include the following:

   • to chair the meeting of the STAGE;
   • to liaise with the WHO Secretariat between meetings.

In appointing a Chairperson, consideration shall be given to gender and geographical representation.

3. Members of the STAGE shall be appointed to serve for a period of three years and shall be eligible for reappointment. A Chairperson is eligible for reappointment as a member of the AG, however, is only permitted to serve as Chairperson for two terms. Their appointment and/or designation as Chairperson may be terminated at any time by WHO if WHO’s interest so requires or as otherwise specified in these terms of reference or letters of appointment. Where a member’s appointment is terminated, WHO may decide to appoint a replacement member.

4. STAGE members must respect the impartiality and independence required of WHO. In performing their work, members may not seek or accept instructions from any Government or from any authority external to the Organization. They must be free of any real, potential or apparent conflicts of interest. To this end, proposed members/members shall be required to complete a declaration of interests form and their appointment, or continuation of their appointment, shall be subject to the evaluation of completed forms by the WHO Secretariat, determining that their participation would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

1 Members serve as full participants and partake in the decision-making process of the meeting in which they are involved.
5. Following a determination that a proposed member’s participation in the STAGE would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest, the proposed member will be sent a letter inviting them to be a member of the STAGE. Their appointment to the STAGE is subject to WHO receiving the countersigned invitation letter and letter of agreement. Notwithstanding the requirement to complete the WHO declaration of interest form, STAGE members have an ongoing obligation to inform the WHO of any interests real or perceived that may give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

6. As contemplated in paragraph II.4 above, WHO may, from time to time, request STAGE members to complete a new declaration of interest form. This may be before a STAGE meeting or any other STAGE-related activity or engagement, as decided by WHO. Where WHO has made such a request, the STAGE member’s participation in the STAGE activity or engagement is subject to a determination that their participation would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

7. Where a STAGE member is invited by WHO to travel to an in-person STAGE meeting, WHO shall, subject to any conflict of interest determination as set out in paragraph II.6 above, issue a letter of appointment as a temporary adviser and accompanying memorandum of agreement (together ‘Temporary Adviser Letter’). WHO shall not authorize travel by a STAGE member, until it receives a countersigned Temporary Adviser Letter.

8. STAGE members do not receive any remuneration from the Organization for any work related to the STAGE. However, when attending in-person meetings at the invitation of WHO, their travel cost and per diem shall be covered by WHO in accordance with the applicable WHO rules and policies.

III. Operation

1. The STAGE shall normally meet at least once each year. However, WHO may convene additional meetings. STAGE meetings may be held in person (at WHO headquarters in Geneva or another location, as determined by WHO) or virtually, via video or teleconference.

STAGE meetings may be held in open and/or closed session, as decided by the Chairperson in consultation with WHO.

a. Open sessions: Open sessions shall be convened for the sole purpose of the exchange of non-confidential information and views and may be attended by Observers (as defined in paragraph III.3 below).

b. Closed sessions: The sessions dealing with the formulation of recommendations and/or advice to WHO shall be restricted to the members of the STAGE and essential WHO Secretariat staff.

2. The quorum for STAGE meetings shall be two thirds of the members.
3. WHO may, at its sole discretion, invite external individuals from time to time to attend the open sessions of an advisory group, or parts thereof, as “observers”. Observers may be invited either in their personal capacity, or as representatives from a governmental institution / intergovernmental organization, or from a non-state actor. WHO will request observers invited in their personal capacity to complete a confidentiality undertaking and a declaration of interests form prior to attending a session of the advisory group. Invitations to observers attending as representatives from non-state actors will be subject to internal due diligence and conflict of interest considerations in accordance with FENSA. Observers invited as representatives may also be requested to complete a confidentiality undertaking. Observers shall normally attend meetings of the STAGE at their own expense and be responsible for making all arrangements in that regard.

At the invitation of the Chairperson, observers may be asked to present their personal views and/or the policies of their organization. Observers will not participate in the process of adopting decisions and recommendations of the STAGE.

4. The STAGE may decide to establish smaller working groups (sub-groups of the STAGE) to work on specific issues. Their deliberations shall take place via teleconference or video-conference. For these sub-groups, no quorum requirement will apply; the outcome of their deliberations will be submitted to the STAGE for review at one of its meetings.

5. STAGE members are expected to attend meetings. If a member misses two consecutive meetings, WHO may end his/her appointment as a member of the STAGE.

6. Reports of each meeting shall be submitted by the STAGE to WHO (the Assistant Director-General of the responsible Cluster). All recommendations from the STAGE are advisory to WHO, who retains full control over any subsequent decisions or actions regarding any proposals, policy issues or other matters considered by the STAGE.

7. The STAGE shall normally make recommendations by consensus. If, in exceptional circumstances, a consensus on a particular issue cannot be reached, minority opinions will be reflected in the meeting report.

8. Active participation is expected from all STAGE members, including in working groups, teleconferences, and interaction over email. STAGE members may, in advance of STAGE meetings, be requested to review meeting documentation and to provide their views for consideration by the STAGE.

9. WHO shall determine the modes of communication by the STAGE, including between WHO and the STAGE members, and the STAGE members among themselves.

10. STAGE members shall not speak on behalf of, or represent, the STAGE or WHO to any third party.
IV. Secretariat

WHO shall provide the secretariat for the STAGE, including necessary scientific, technical, administrative and other support. In this regard, the WHO Secretariat shall provide the members in advance of each meeting with the agenda, working documents and discussion papers. Distribution of the aforesaid documents to Observers will be determined by the WHO Secretariat. The meeting agenda shall include details such as: whether a meeting, or part thereof, is closed or open; and whether Observers are permitted to attend.

V. Information and documentation

1. Information and documentation to which members may gain access in performing STAGE related activities shall be considered as confidential and proprietary to WHO and/or parties collaborating with WHO. In addition, by counter signing the letter of appointment and the accompanying terms and conditions referred to in section II(5) above, STAGE members undertake to abide by the confidentiality obligations contained therein and also confirm that any and all rights in the work performed by them in connection with, or as a result of their STAGE-related activities shall be exclusively vested in WHO.

2. STAGE members and Observers shall not quote from, circulate or use STAGE documents for any purpose other than in a manner consistent with their responsibilities under these Terms of Reference.

3. WHO retains full control over the publication of the reports of the STAGE, including deciding whether or not to publish them.