

Countdown to 2015  
Core Group Meeting on Management and Technical Issues

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New York City, New York, USA

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**Summary of Meeting Outcomes**

**I. Consensus on the Purpose and Aim of the Countdown:**

- All in attendance re-affirmed the focus of the Countdown on presenting data that can be used as a key strategic tool within the global health community and by countries themselves;
- The supra-institutional quality of the Countdown was re-confirmed, but all present acknowledged the need to establish a clear and efficient management structure (and a structure that would promote mutual accountability);
- Consensus was reached that the production and dissemination of the highest quality evidence is the heart of the Countdown and that the Countdown data should be used for country action;
- The Countdown will continue to focus on the continuum of care, and will strongly link with other initiatives including those aimed at strengthening health systems, nutrition, immunization and water & sanitation.

**Key Action Points by Meeting Objective:**

**II. Objective 1.** Develop consensus on proposed Countdown to 2015 management and leadership structure;

- Consensus was reached that the new managerial structure of the Countdown to 2015 effort will include having a central organizing and coordinating committee overseeing two sub-committees (technical and advocacy).
- The Core Group will remain an open-membership, consultative entity. Meeting participants re-affirmed the need for regular communication with the Core Group and to consider this group a pool of resources that can be mobilized for specific tasks. The Core Group will be convened on an annual basis to provide inputs on the directions for future work, and to review updates on the activities of the coordinating committee, the technical and advocacy sub-committees, and the technical working groups.
- The Country action and follow-up technical committee was removed and all agreed that promotion of country level work should be mainstreamed into the

ToRs of the technical and advocacy sub-committees (and within the ToRs for each of the technical working groups).

- The Coordinating Committee will be the managing body of the initiative and will be composed of 10 people – 2 co-chairs, 2 of the three chairs of the Technical sub-committee, 1 of the co-chairs from each of the 4 technical working groups, and both co-chairs of the advocacy sub-committee.
- All agreed that the composition of the Coordinating Committee must have a balanced membership across constituencies and the continuum of care, and ensure representation from the South.
- Consensus was reached that the co-chairs for the technical working groups should consist of one UN representative and one representative of civil society. Participants also agreed that the technical sub-committee will function as a coordinating mechanism for the technical working groups.
- All in attendance re-affirmed that balanced representation across constituencies and the continuum of care is crucial for membership in the technical sub-committee (and associated working groups) and advocacy sub-committee, but that the most important criterion for membership remains dedication and commitment to the Countdown effort.
- All agreed on the selections of the co-chairs for the two sub-committees and technical working groups. These selections were made based on the active and dedicated participation of these particular individuals (or their institutions) in the previous Countdown cycles: The technical sub-committee will have 3 co-chairs to ensure a balanced representation across the continuum of care (Dr. Elizabeth Mason, WHO; a representative from UNFPA; and Dr. Joy Lawn, Save the Children, US). Each technical working group will have co-chairs (coverage working group, Dr. Tessa Wardlaw (UNICEF) and Dr. Jennifer Bryce (JHSPH); equity working group, Dr. Cesar Victora (Universidade Federal de Pelotas) and Dr. Ties Boerma (WHO); policy working group, Dr. Bernadette Daelmans (WHO) and Ms. Helga Fogstad (Norad); financing working group will consist of representatives from LSHTM and the World Bank (individuals to be determined, alternates include Dr. Tessa Tan Torres from the WHO). The advocacy sub-committee will consist of co-chairs (Dr. Flavia Bustreo, PMNCH; and Ms. Debra Jones, FCI acting for Ms. Ann Starrs).
- Core Group members from the World Bank and from LSTHM will respond within the week about accepting the responsibility of serving as co-chairs for the Financing Working Group.
- Nominations for the 10 slots for the Coordinating Committee included: Dr. Zulfiqar Bhutta (Aga Khan University) and Dr. Peter Salama (UNICEF) to serve as co-chairs. Dr. Salama agreed to serve as co-chair on a possibly time-limited

basis. Dr. Elizabeth Mason (WHO) and the UNFPA representative from the technical sub-committee, Dr. Jennifer Bryce (JHSPH) from the coverage working group, Dr. Cesar Victora (Universidade Federal de Pelotas) from the equity working group, Ms. Helga Fogstad (Norad) from the policy working group, the LSHTM representative from the financing working group; and Ms. Ann Starrs (FCI) and Dr. Flavia Bustreo (PMNCH) from the advocacy sub-committee.

- The first tasks of the new Countdown Coordinating Committee will involve defining a fund-raising strategy, developing a proposal for funding based on inputs from the technical working groups and sub-committees, determining where the budget sits for this initiative, coming to an early decision about the timing and location of the next Countdown taking into consideration the next release of MICS and DHS data, and discussing how the issue of accountability can be fully addressed.
- Ms. Helga Fogstad (Norad) generously offered to explore the issue of making bridge funds available, informally noting the possible availability of money earmarked for the PMNCH for activities related to the continuum of care. UNICEF will also look into this issue so that momentum is not lost.

**III. Objective 2. Review TOR and preliminary work plans for the Technical Sub-Committee and related technical working groups:**

- It was agreed that a Technical Sub-Committee should provide oversight and contribute to the harmonization of the workplans of the 4 working groups. The technical sub-committee will ensure the workplans are reflective of the continuum of care including nutrition and water and sanitation. The Technical Sub-Committee will provide technical clearance for all Countdown-related publications including advocacy materials.
- The workplans, budgets, and staffing requests for each technical working group were endorsed with specific follow-up actions recommended. Co-chairs of all the working groups were entrusted with ensuring a balanced representation in their respective groups of all constituencies and each dimension across the continuum of care (including nutrition and water and sanitation), and fostering participation from the South. Co-chairs were also asked to incorporate details into their workplans about how their activities will have a country-level orientation/promote country-level action. In addition, co-chairs were requested to re-construct their workplans using the Equity workplan as a template (a format originally designed by Dr. Jennifer Bryce for the previous Countdown cycle, which ties specific objectives with a specific product and a matching budget). The working group budgets should not include earmarked funding for sector-wide activities (e.g., advocacy or country engagement activities – overall decisions about country level work/consultations will be part of the TOR of the overarching Coordinating Committee).

- The Policy Working Group was asked to remove from the TOR reference to country consultations and specific advocacy activities.
- The Financial Flows Working Groups was advised to re-think the analytical plan taking into consideration: The inclusion of nutrition into the Countdown and the intersection between the financial flows to MNCH, health systems strengthening, and to other major diseases such as HIV and malaria; how the financial flows analysis links up with other global initiatives tracking the health MDGs; how to better capture the private sector and out-of-pocket expenditures; include a focus on sub-sector allocation and domestic financial flows; conduct a deeper analysis on the determinants of what brings aid into countries and how these monies are allocated; assessment of the value of creating a global gap figure; and possibly examining the budgets of international organizations, determining what proportion of their budgets are earmarked for MNCH and the factors influencing how much money gets targeted at MNCH. Participation of representatives from the World Bank in the Financial Flows Working Group was recommended to broaden the picture of fiscal space in the analysis.
- Core Group members interested in joining a working group should email the respective co-chair. Co-chairs can determine the composition of their working groups and can remove members if they repeatedly under-participate in working group activities.
- Co-Chairs should revise their proposed work plans as soon as possible to facilitate requests for interim funding.

**IV. Objective 3.** Review TOR and preliminary work plan for the Advocacy Sub-Committee:

- The proposed TOR for the Advocacy Sub-Committee was endorsed following revision of the workplan and management structure to ensure that: a.) The proposed IPU work is managed in such a way that existing relationships between the IPU and Countdown partners are not negatively impacted; b.) A process is put into place ensuring that all advocacy materials receive technical clearance before being released; c.) A process is put into place ensuring clearance through the overarching Coordinating Group for the launching of high-level advocacy activities/initiatives; d.) The branding of the Countdown is clearly distinguished from the PMNCH. Specifically, the terms of the management structure must make evident that the PMNCH will act on behalf of the full range of Countdown partners in its role as co-chair of the advocacy sub-committee; e.) A process for handling data inquiries raised by countries is established in coordination with the technical sub-committee; e.) A mechanism for taking fuller advantage of the resources and potential of Countdown partners is developed; f.) The proposed work plan should be revised to be more targeted and focused on specific activities; and g.) Co-chairs populate the sub-committee with individuals representative of all constituencies and each dimension across the continuum of

care (including nutrition and water and sanitation), and foster participation from the South.

- The event coordination process (the logistics involved in setting up and holding the Conference) is an activity of the advocacy sub-committee, but key decisions about where and when the next Countdown conference will be held will be made by the Coordinating Committee

**V. Objective 4.** Review TOR and preliminary work plan for Country Action Sub-Committee:

- Core Group members in attendance agreed not to endorse the establishment of a Country Action and Follow-up Sub-Committee. Instead a country-level orientation will be mainstreamed through all the technical working groups and the Advocacy Sub-Committee (each group will include in their workplans how their activities can promote country level action). The TOR of the Coordinating committee will include developing a harmonized approach for consulting with countries.

**VI. Objective 5.** Review the initial concept of the Regional Asia/Pacific Countdown.

- Dr. Peter Salama (UNICEF) will share the feedback received from Core Group members with the informal MNCH network in the Asia and Pacific region, and will then report their responses back to the Core Group.

**VII. Additional Issues:**

- In the next Countdown cycle, reproductive health needs to be specifically mentioned as part of the continuum of care, and aspects related to reproductive health need to be more fully reflected in the policy and coverage indicators.