

Summary report on the

Consultative meeting of GOARN partners in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

WHO-EM/CSR/122/E

Cairo, Egypt
14–15 December 2016



**World Health
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

The recurrence of emerging infectious disease epidemics remains a major threat to health and security in the World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Region. As part of the global response to public health threats, WHO and key public health institutions across the globe established the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) in April 2000.

One of the main strategic objectives of GOARN is to support further development of the network, including engaging more regional-level institutions, to improve the response to public health emergencies. This entails the establishment of a regional network of institutions within GOARN. The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has been working since 2012 to establish such a regional network of public health institutions and other centres of expertise with a view to delivering timely, rapid and effective support for the prevention and control of infectious disease outbreaks and public health emergencies in the Region.

In October 2015, the Regional Office, in collaboration with WHO headquarters, convened a regional GOARN partners meeting in Casablanca, Morocco, to recruit new partner institutions to the network and embark on a plan to build the capacities of partner institutions for international outbreak response. The meeting recommended the detailed review of GOARN guiding principles, the scope of work of the regional network and the rules of engagement for partner institutions, and, where necessary, the drafting of appropriate documents to formalize operational links between partner institutions and the network, including WHO.

In line with these recommendations, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean held a two-day consultative meeting with key

regional GOARN partners at the Regional Office in Cairo, Egypt, from 14 to 15 December 2016. The meeting was attended by representatives from regional institutions, along with other partner agencies, including the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) and the US Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3 (NAMRU-3), and WHO staff members from headquarters and regional offices.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- introduce the newly-recruited regional partner institutions to GOARN principles and deployment procedures;
- discuss the current GOARN guiding principles, rules of engagement and standard operating procedures for deployment of GOARN partner institutions for international outbreak response;
- review and agree on the joint plan of action for GOARN regional partner institutions and WHO for 2017.

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr Mamunur Rahman Malik, Manager, Infectious Hazards Management, on behalf of Dr Jaouad Mahjour, Director of Programme Management and Regional Emergency Director *ad interim*. Dr Malik expressed his appreciation for the role of GOARN and its partner institutions in supporting the Regional Office's operational response to a number of widening and threatening outbreaks in the Region.

2. Summary of discussions

Updates on GOARN

The participants discussed their experiences of current/past GOARN missions in the Region and globally, including during the Ebola virus disease outbreak in west Africa, as well as discussing the secondment of staff to WHO and regional training activities. Updates were provided on

the development of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, the expansion of GOARN activities (GOARN 2.0) and WHO activities to strengthen the response capacity in the Region, including the scenario-based GOARN training course for partner institutions that concluded in Jordan in October 2016. The participants were also briefed on the launch of the new GOARN knowledge platform.

Introduction to GOARN principles, structure, operations and deployment procedures

Participants were introduced to GOARN guiding principles, the existing structure of the network and the ongoing work to revise the standard operating procedures to address the broad spectrum of operations, including alert and communications, risk assessment and investigation, and the planning and coordination of deployment procedures.

Revision of key GOARN documents

There was discussion on the revision of key GOARN foundational documents as part of the GOARN 2.0 development process. This included an overview of the revision of the guiding principles, the structure, and the rationale and timeline for the revision.

Revision of GOARN standard operating procedures

There was also discussion on the revision process for the standard operating procedures for deployment, including the guiding principles, code of conduct, expected commitments of partners and the GOARN Operational Support Teams based at WHO headquarters and the Regional Office. The information and data sharing process for GOARN alerts, risk assessment and submitting requests for assistance by partner institutions using the newly-developed knowledge platform were also addressed.

Participants reviewed the operational definitions of “triggers” and currently-existing procedures, as well as ongoing work on the revision of procedures for deployment of experts from partner institutions to support international outbreak response operations. The mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of GOARN operations in the field was also discussed.

Immediate priorities and next steps to formalize and strengthen the relationship between partner institutions of GOARN and the Regional Office were identified, including the deployment and active use of the existing trained regional response cohorts/capacity.

3. Conclusions

There is strong commitment and willingness among all partner institutions of GOARN to provide rapid and appropriate international support to Member States facing public health emergencies in the Region and globally. The participants in the meeting from partner agencies acquired knowledge on the current guiding principles and rules of engagement for international outbreak response under GOARN, its current structure, the Operational Support Team and the ongoing work on the revision of standard operating procedures for international deployment. The regional partner agencies were also provided with the requirements necessary for international outbreak deployment, such as having a cohort of trained personnel.

Following the discussions, a regional work plan for 2017 was presented and discussed. This included further training for field deployment and missions, a global meeting of network partners, pre-deployment and other security training required for deployment in conflict- and war-affected countries, and a learning exchange programme between network partners and WHO.

4. Recommendations

1. GOARN should engage experts from regional partner institutions who have been trained during 2016 in GOARN outbreak response for outbreak response missions in the Region.
2. The regional GOARN focal point should identify trainees for safe and secure approaches in field environments (SSAFE) training organized by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security from the trained cohorts of the GOARN outbreak response training and enrol them in the upcoming training as part of enhancing the readiness of the Regional Office for international deployment in conflict- and war-affected countries in the Region. The GOARN Operational Support Team at WHO headquarters should provide funding for the training.
3. The GOARN Operational Support Team at WHO headquarters should conduct similar workshops or face-to-face meetings for the partner institutions of GOARN in other WHO regions. These meetings would provide an opportunity for the GOARN Operational Support Team to hear the perspectives of regional partners on the strategy for the development and operation of GOARN 2.0, as endorsed by the WHO Global Policy Group.
4. The regional GOARN focal point should develop terms of reference for the placement/knowledge-exchange programme between WHO and GOARN partner institutions. The GOARN Operational Support Team should issue a call for applications for this exchange programme and select candidates, in consultation with the Regional Office, for placement at the Regional Office. The GOARN Operational Support Team should allocate funds to cover the cost of the exchange programme.
5. The Regional Office should place, by rotation, two of its administrative staff with the GOARN Operational Support Team in WHO headquarters in Geneva for knowledge transfer and to ensure that the GOARN Operational Support Team at the Regional Office

are familiar with the operational procedures for international deployment of experts from GOARN partner institutions for outbreak response missions. This would help the Regional Office to provide support to future deployment operations for outbreak missions in line with GOARN operational procedures.

6. Both the Regional Office and the GOARN Operational Support Team at WHO headquarters in Geneva should identify and support a number of other network-related activities to enhance the capacities of regional partner institutions.



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