

4th GMS Working Group on Health Cooperation Meeting

On 8 December 2021, the 4th GMS Working Group on Health Cooperation Meeting (WGHC) was held and hosted by the Ministry of Health (MOH), Viet Nam. Over 80 participants, including WGHC members, senior health officials from GMS countries, development partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), GAVI (The Vaccine Alliance), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Civil Society Organization (CSO), and vaccine manufacturer actively participated in the meeting.

Ms. Pham Thi Minh Chau, Deputy Director General from MOH, Viet Nam welcomed the participants and explained that sharing experiences on COVID-19 vaccination and One Health development in the GMS was an important component of regional solidarity and health cooperation in the GMS region.

Ms. Ayako Inagaki, Director, South East Asia Department, ADB highlighted ADB's long-term strategic orientation in the health sector with strong emphasis on regional health security and the prevention of future pandemics. She emphasized the importance of equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and informed of ADB's Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility (APVAX) supporting developing member countries to roll-out COVID-19 vaccines.

COVID-19 Vaccine-Roll-out

Dr. Ridwan Gustiana, UNICEF Regional Immunization Specialist, updated on the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out and highlighted opportunities and challenges for effective vaccine management in the region. He elaborated on vaccine production capacity, digital health solutions to support both COVID-19 and routine immunization, and the need for further innovations in COVID-19 vaccination. He particularly highlighted vaccine vial monitors, long-lasting passive cold boxes for outreach vaccination, and use of drones for hard-to-reach areas to reduce delivery time and wastage.

Dr. Jayantha Liyanage, WHO SEARO Regional Advisor for Immunization Systems Strengthening, shared information on evidence-based approaches to enhance COVID-19 vaccination coverage, such as: strengthening immunization information systems, enhancing digital systems for registration and issuing vaccination certificates, real-time monitoring dashboards, home based and provider-based vaccination records to enhance vaccine safety. He also provided updates on COVID-19 vaccine Post-Introduction Evaluations (PIE) and on adverse effect following immunization (AEFI) surveillance.

Ms. Allison Zerkowitz, Director of Save the Children's Center for Utilizing Behavioral Insights for Children (CUBIC), shared evidence-based approaches to building demand for COVID-19 vaccination. She highlighted various barriers encountered across a range of countries, the role of social media campaigns, and the opportunity to use tested messaging to drive vaccine registration. She also emphasized how upcoming demand promotion challenges will begin to shift towards the uptake of booster doses.

Breakout 1

Participants split into three groups to discuss with the speakers from UNICEF, WHO, and Save the Children. The discussions mainly focus on vaccine logistics, vaccine accessibility and community acceptability. Participants also discussed the importance of microplanning, integrating COVID-19

vaccination into routine immunization, and the necessary strategies to achieve the WHO target of 70% coverage by mid-2022.

COVID-19 Vaccine Supply, Manufacturing, Research and Development.

Dr. Sam Muller, COVAX Head of Country Engagement, gave an update on the global vaccine needs and production capacities from Q4 2021-Q4 2022. He highlighted that supply is not expected to be a major bottleneck in the coming year, emphasizing other barriers including absorption capacity, vaccine hesitancy, production delays for specific products, timing of shipments, and the possibility of specific shortages of vaccines for adolescents, children, and boosters. He recommended that countries have a clear national procurement plan including a range of procurement partners, suppliers, and on the importance of negotiating minimum shelf-life requirements as part of vaccine procurement contracts.

Ms. Cheryl Law, Vaccine Business Director from Sinovac, shared that 2.1 billion doses of Sinovac have already been supplied to over 53 countries around the world. She also shared data on the efficacy and safety of the Sinovac vaccine. Ms. Xing Meng, Sinovac Medical Manager, shared additional details on clinical trials on Sinovac efficacy in Africa and South America, while presenting upcoming studies related to the use of Sinovac in children, the durability of immunity provided by booster doses, and the possibility of use of Sinovac as part of a heterologous booster strategy.

Breakout 2

Participants split into two groups with each of the speakers from COVAX and Sinovac. The discussion focused on effectiveness of existing vaccines against new variants like Omicron and the impacts of COVID-19 on routine immunization. Participants also addressed bottlenecks on human resource to improve coverage on both COVID-19 and routine immunizations. The study results of Sinovac's vaccine and its effectiveness in preventing serious illness and deaths related to COVID-19 were also shared.

Updates on One Health and APVAX

Associate Professor Angus Campbell from the Nossal Institute in Australia provided an overview of the One Health initiatives in the GMS. He also touched on the importance of mainstreaming health security through the One Health approach and improving intersectoral activities as GMS countries transition into the COVID-19 recovery phase. He also explained how Nossal Institute will continue to engage with GMS-countries going forward in 2022.

Dr. Eduardo Banzon, ADB Principal Health Specialist, briefed the participants on the COVID-19 situation and vaccination status in ASEAN, noting the significant successes of several countries. He informed of the ADB \$9 billion APVAX facility that provides rapid vaccine support to DMCs, with a number of countries having already received financing and more with pending approval. He emphasized that beyond the APVAX financing for vaccine procurement and project investments, ADB continues to provide countries with a range of technical assistance packages to help optimize and enhance their COVID-19 vaccination delivery.

Way forward

Mr. Rikard Elfving, ADB Senior Social Sector Specialist, underlined that regional health collaboration and communicable disease control is a priority in the GMS region. He highlighted the important role of COVID-19 vaccination in driving the post-COVID-19 economic recovery. Solidarity and partnerships between GMS countries is key in supporting the region having equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines

going forward. He also informed that the 5th Annual Meeting of the Working Group for Health Cooperation will be hosted by the Government of Cambodia. A date for this meeting will be communicated at later stage.

Dr. Lo Veasnakiry, Secretary of State, MOH Cambodia emphasized that the emergence of new COVID-19 variants continues to pose challenges, and stressed the importance of One Health approaches as an area for future collaboration to improve regional capacity in the GMS.

Ms. Shao Meng, Director, Department of International Cooperation, National Health Commission of People's Republic of China highlighted the importance of equitable access to vaccine production. She reaffirmed support for the GMS countries and recommended that the 2022 workplan of the GMS Working Group is consultative and focus key areas not yet covered by other development partners.

Dr. Bounserth Keopasith, Director, General Department of Planning and International Cooperation, MOH, Lao PDR encouraged deeper partnerships and collaboration to overcome the challenges to accessibility of COVID-19 vaccine among GMS countries.

Dr. Suriwan Thaiprayoon, Policy and Plan Analyst, Global Health Division, MOPH Thailand, acknowledged the speakers and partners and thanked them for sharing global and regional experiences for better collaboration in the spirit of solidarity to overcome the pandemic and promote future health cooperation in the GMS.

Ms. Pham Thi Minh Chau, Deputy Director General, Department of International Cooperation, MOH Viet Nam appreciated the sharing of lessons and actions for planning COVID-19 vaccination, pandemic preparedness, and One Health initiatives in the GMS countries. She acknowledged the support of ADB and other partners to strengthen health cooperation to prevent public health threats and protect vulnerable populations from emerging infectious diseases in the GMS.

Annexes

- [Concept Note and Agenda](#)
- [Presentations](#)
- [List of participants](#)