



National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

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National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Key Messages

- Establishment of a NITAG is an « old » global recommendation to countries to ensure ownership and cohesion around immunization decision-making process
- NITAG's mandate, structure and mode of functioning are different from those of other immunization committees: no overlap or duplication,
- NITAG's added value is a reinforcement of the national decision-making making process, therefore credibility and acceptability of immunization strategies





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Global recommendations on NITAGs

- + WHO-UNICEF **Global Immunization Vision & Strategy** 2006-2015
- + **WHA 61.15 (2008)**, “WHA requests the DG to...strengthen national capacity for making evidence-based policy decisions to adopt new vaccines”
- + **SAGE recommendations**
 - WER: N0 1-2, 2009, 84, 1-16 “One of WHO’s priorities as part of the process of ensuring evidence-based decision-making at country level is to establish and/or strengthen national immunization technical advisory committees (NITAGs), increasingly called for given the complexity of immunization programmes and the high cost of new vaccines”.
 - WER N0 21, 2011, 86, 205-220 : “Priority topics for SAGE meetings identified through a survey of SAGE members included: strengthening of national technical advisory groups on immunization (NITAGs)”.
 - REH N0 1, 2014, 89, 1-20 : “SAGE recommended that **countries and partners increase their effort to ensure that every country has a functional National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG), in view of the need for NITAGs to play a role in improving data quality, especially on vaccine coverage and disease impact and to ensure that decisions are based on strong evidence**”.





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Global recommendations on NITAGs

WHA May 2012 Resolution WHA 65/17: Decade of Vaccines Global Vaccine Action Plan,

First strategic objective: All countries commit to
immunization as a priority

"National legislation, policies and resource allocation
decisions should be informed by credible and current
evidence regarding the direct and indirect impact of
immunization. Much of the evidence base exists but
does not reach policy-makers, as those who generate
the evidence are not always those who interact with
these decision-makers. ..."





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Global recommendations on NITAGs

GVAP, WHA May 2012

First strategic objective: All countries commit to immunization as a priority

"Independent bodies such as regional or national immunization technical advisory groups (NITAGs) that can guide country policies and strategies based on local epidemiology and cost effectiveness should be established or strengthened, thus reducing dependency on external bodies for policy guidance. ... It is important that NITAGs or their regional equivalents, engage with academia, professional societies, and other national agencies and committees... to ensure a cohesive and coordinated approach to achieving national health priorities..."





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Why the call for NITAGs?

New dynamic in vaccination

Opportunities

- Introduction of new vaccines
- Diversification of producers
- New funding sources
- Diversification of target populations

Challenges faced by low- or middle-income countries

- Concurrent health priorities
- Need to adapt global recommendations to the local context
- Limited human and logistical resources



Population requiring more information on vaccination and adequate response to their concerns



National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Existing vaccination committees vs NITAGs

	ICC	Disease-specific committees (Polio; measles; MNT...)	NITAG
Mandate	Coordination between Partners and EPI Resource mobilization Advocacy Executive role	Monitoring progress towards specific EPI goal Time-limited Executive role/ supervision	Collection and analysis of factual data to provide MoH with evidence-based advice Advisory role
Membership	Chair: High level MoH Technical & funding agencies Other organizations Private sector	Chair: High level MoH or expert National experts Technical & funding agencies Other organizations Private sector	Chair: not under MoH authority ≠ Categories ✓ Core : decision ✓ Liaison & ex-officio: contribution
Scope	Programmatic issues EPI routine & campaigns	Programmatic issues EPI routine & campaigns	All vaccinations issues (EPI, adults, schedules & administration , up-to-date information base...)





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

What is a NITAG?

National technical advisory committee made up of **national independent experts**, in charge of guiding health authorities and leaders of national immunization programs in the definition and implementation of national **evidence-based vaccination** policies and strategies.

- **Advisory** Committee: final decisions are made by national authorities
- **National Technical** Committee: national expertise required to adapt global recommendations to local context
- **Independent experts**: in the committee in their own capacity
- **Evidence-based policies**: a systematic and transparent process of collecting and evaluating the evidence supporting the recommendation





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Immunization policy-making & implementation framework – NITAG's role

Technical & advisory



Financial & operational





NITAGs establishment
Composition
Mode of operations



National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

NITAG establishment

- + The MoH set-up a working group to develop the **concept paper** describing the future NITAG:
 - A situation analysis of the country immunization context including decision-making process,
 - Terms of Reference (ToR) and Standard Operating Procedures (SoP)
 - Description of members' roles and responsibilities
 - Line of reporting
- + **Formal** selection, nomination and establishment (e.g: ministerial decree or an equivalent)
- + This process ensures the **sustainability** of the committee and its **integration in the national system**





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

NITAG composition

+ **Core Members** (voting)

- Experts who serve in their own capacity: independent experts
- 10-15 members
- Participate in the final decision in the deliberations
- Multidisciplinary expertise: pediatricians, epidemiologists, public health experts, health economists, vaccinology experts, experts on clinical trials, logistics/cold chain experts, social scientists etc.

+ **Non-core members** (non voting)

- Provide background information or required evidence
- Do not participate in the final decision of the committee
- **Ex-officio members:** representing important government entities e.g.: MoH different divisions, NRA, Lab etc.
- **Liaison members:** representing professional societies, associations, other national advisory committees and key partners e.g. WHO, UNICEF etc.
- **Secretariat:** technical and administrative support; host institution has institutional relationship with MoH





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

NITAG mode of operations

NITAGs Guiding principles

- **Independence**
 - + Members sit in the committee in their own capacity
 - + Independent expertise from manufacturers, MoH, WHO, UNICEF, AMP..
 - + No service fees paid (transport reimbursement aligned with local practice)
- **Transparency:**
 - + Declaration of conflict of interest mandatory
 - + Conduct of business detailed in the Operating Procedures manual
- **Use of standardized and systematic approach in decision-making process:**
 - evidence-based recommendations vs experts opinions





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

What is an evidence-based recommendation?

- + Evidence-based recommendations are generated from a **systematic, credible, and transparent process of selecting, reviewing and synthesizing the evidence for supporting the recommendation.**

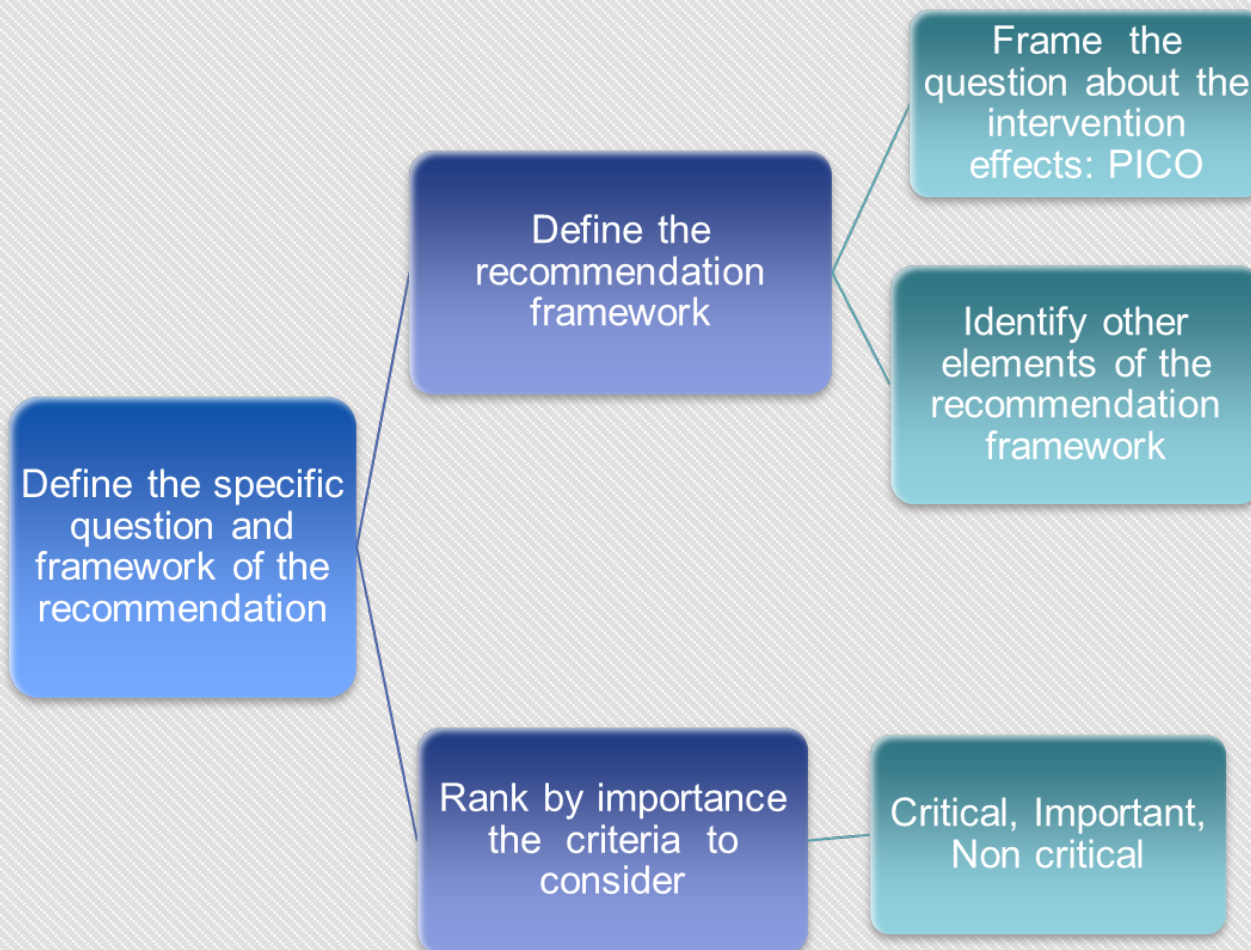
Quality of the recommendation lies on quality of evidence, comprehensive relevant elements for the basis of the recommendation and is reinforced by **transparency about the ground for decision**





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

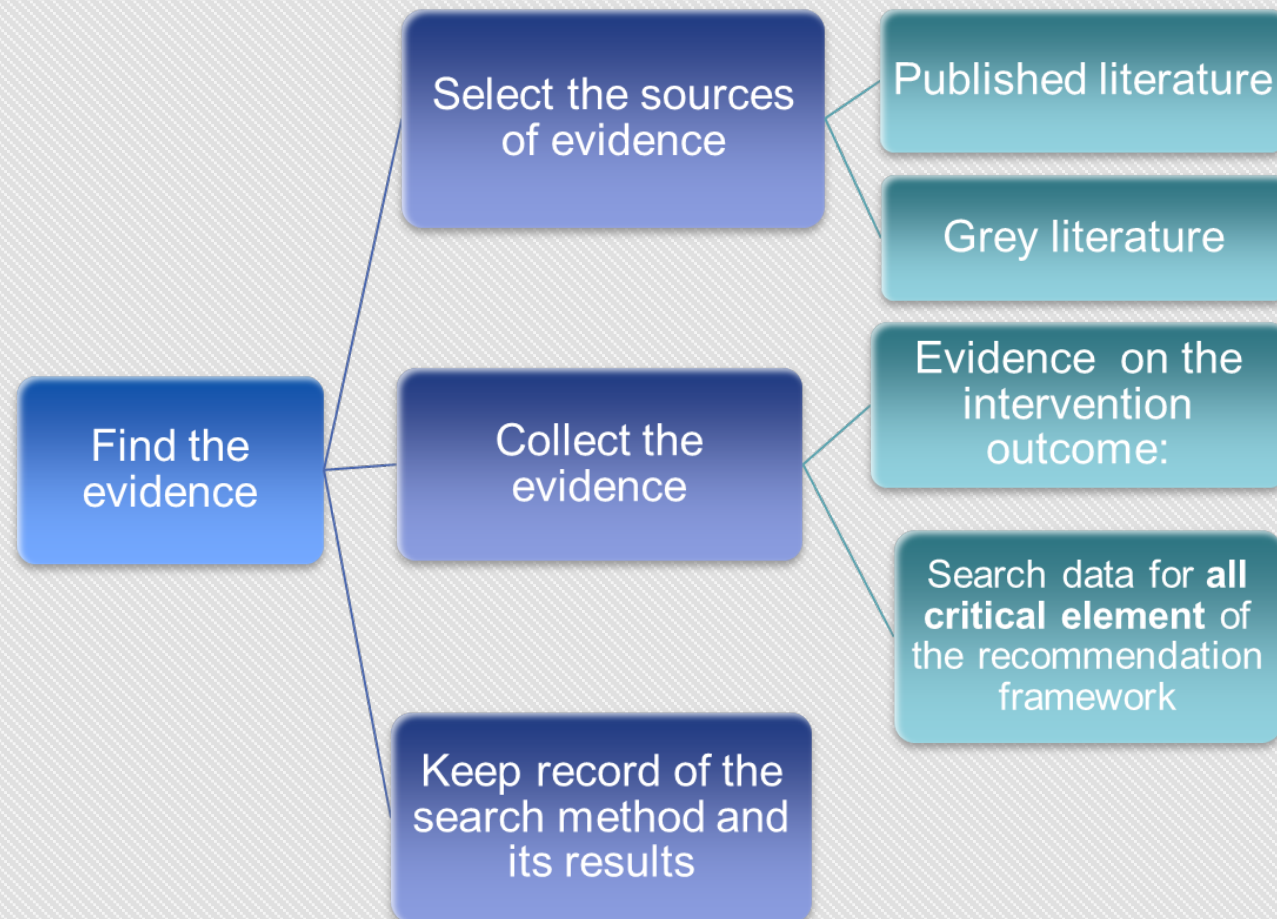
Process of EB recommendation development





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Process of EB recommendation development





National
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Process of EB recommendation development

Assess the quality of
evidence

Clinical /observational
studies on
Intervention
outcome/effect

Systematic review of
studies using GRADE
methodology

Review of systematic
reviews, AMSTAR,
CASP, SIGN

Non
clinical/observational
studies on the other
criteria for
recommendation

Quality assessment
check-list: CASP,
CAQR, SIGN





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

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Example: framework of recommendation

TYPE OF OUTCOME AND SPECIFIC DATA

Safety (Should always be chosen as an outcome)

	Type, consequences and frequency of short- and long-term adverse events following vaccination	
	Type and frequency of risk groups or risk factors for adverse events	
	Contra-indications for vaccination	
	For live attenuated vaccines: risk of reversion to virulence	

Efficacy and Effectiveness by population and /or subgroups of population

	Type-specific protection afforded	
	Critical determinants of the immune response associated with protection	
	Duration of protection	
	Waning immunity if any	
	Optimal vaccination schedule (dosage, age, and booster) to protect the vaccinated individual?	





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Outline of the recommendation

+ **Executive summary**

+ **Introduction**

- Context of the question
- General information on the subject

+ **Methods**

- Description of the process used to identify, select, assess and synthesize the evidence
- Description of the process used in developing the recommendation note

+ **Analysis of the evidence**

- The judgment of the evidence both on the intervention as well as on health systems and context issues which were taken into account in the recommendation framework

+ **Conclusion:**

- The recommendation must be clearly formulated and demonstrate how it is linked to the available evidence





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

The operating procedures manual

Objective of the document is to lay down members roles and responsibilities and the committee's method of working

Key issues addressed:

- + **Priority setting process**
- + **Frequency and conduct of meetings:** open vs. closed meetings; participation of industry and observers; process for decision making (vote or consensus); preparation and circulation of agenda; declaration of conflict of interests signed by core members and its management; Confidentiality agreement signed by all members; dissemination of meetings minutes
- + **Process for issuing evidence-based recommendation:** preparation of background documents; identification of additional/local evidence to inform recommendation; establishment of working groups for gathering, analysing and preparing report for discussion
- + **Process for communication** of recommendation to the MoH; monitoring implementation of the recommendations





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

NITAG Functioning – Role of the executive secretariat

Secretariat: central pillar of an efficient committee; key to a scientific production of good quality; critical support to the NITAG chair for performing their role

- + **Draft workplan** based on the priorities submitted by MoH or suggested by the committee
- + **Prepare logistic for the meetings**, prepare and circulate minutes
- + **Coordinate** preparation of the technical dossiers for the deliberation session
 - Presentation on background information on the topic under discussion
 - Support working group(s) chaired by a core member and set to:
 - Identify sources of required evidence
 - Evaluate data quality
 - Analyze and synthesize information
 - Develop report and propose recommendations
- + **Finalise report and recommendations**
- + **Prepare annual reports** (technical and financial)
- + **Follow-up on communications with authorities**





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Monitoring and evaluation

A suggested list of NITAG indicators for self assessment

- + **Process or activity indicators** to monitor NITAG functioning :
 - number of meetings, preparation and distribution of agenda and background document, recording of declaration of interests, official requests for recommendations received and addressed
- + **Output indicators** to assess the quality and relevance of recommendations:
 - Evidence-based methodology used for recommendation, inclusion of country-specific criteria for recommendation, elements of the framework for recommendations (including vaccine availability and delivery capacity)
- + **Outcome indicators** to evaluate the impact of recommendations on government policies and strategies:
 - Quantification of MoH final decisions made in consultation with the NITAG, recommendations accepted by the MoH, recommendations; implemented in the country

Reference: Blau J, et al. Indicators to assess National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs). *Vaccine* (2013)

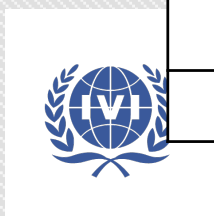




National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

NITAGs in Africa

	Functioning	Starting operations	Initiated
ESA	South Africa Mozambique Zimbabwe	Kenya Uganda South Sudan	Zambia
WA	Côte d'Ivoire Senegal Benin		Burkina Faso Guinea The Gambia Mali Niger Nigeria Togo Ghana
North	Sudan Tunisia Egypt Libya Morocco		Algeria





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Experience in Africa: Successes to share

High commitment

All NITAGs hold their meetings as scheduled

- In Côte d'Ivoire and Tunisia, activities resumed soon after the political situation was stabilized

Compliance with OP

All NITAGs have detailed ToR or Operating Procedures manual

- Conflict of interest forms are signed
- Working groups are established on the topics under discussion
- Participation of observers or external technical resources (partners, pharma) regulated
- Meetings minutes available

Scientific production

MoH take into account advice given by the NITAGs

- Tunisia: ≥ 20 recommendations implemented
- Côte d'Ivoire: application to GAVI for Rota introduction put on hold until collection of additional evidence as recommended by the NITAG





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)



Experience in Africa: Challenges

Human resources constraints in MoH

EPI rely heavily on external support to help them fulfil their role as secretariat

- Côte d'Ivoire: Secretariat hosted by a parastatal institute ; coordinated by 2 staff from the institute; communication with EPI manager not optimum
- Senegal: secretariat within the division of prevention; 2 part-time consultants
- Benin: secretariat within EPI; 1 full-time consultant recruited on donors funds (sustainability?)

Political Interference

Decision remains in MoH remit but decision can be more political than evidence-based

- Mozambique: was very active (≥15 recommendations) but issues in communication with MoH; recommendation regarding PCV introduction turned down by MoH

Financial support

No country has a line in EPI budget to support NITAGs functioning

- Côte d'Ivoire: the institute has a budget line for meetings logistics but rely on partners for other activities
- transport reimbursement is common practice even for other committees



National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Support available to NITAGs

AMP/SIVAC, WHO, Other NITAGs, CDC ..

- Trainings
 - workshop on development of evidence-based recommendations
- Networking, experience sharing, study tours,
 - Benin, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire: meeting to discuss their respective recommendation on IPV
 - Visits to experienced NITAGs
- Avail technical briefs, tools and articles:
 - Templates of internal documents
 - Publications
 - Web based Resource Center
- Technical assistance
 - Preparation of technical dossiers
- Support to reinforce visibility, institutional integration and ensure sustainability
 - Participation to high-level regional meeting (MoH assembly)





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

About the SIVAC Initiative

- Supporting Independent Immunisation and Vaccines Advisory Committee Initiative
- A 7- year project, in collaboration with International Vaccine Institute (Seoul) funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Since December 2012, WHO collaborating Center on “Evidence-informed immunization policy-making”





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Conclusion

- NITAG is a mechanism of reinforcing credibility of immunization programmes and therefore acceptability and sustainability of immunization policies
 - ✓ decisions based on deliberate, rational selection of criteria taking into account local factors (consensus on “hot” issues)
 - ✓ help resist any type of external pressure
 - ✓ keep national authorities informed about the latest scientific developments in immunization area and help them think ahead of possible future changes in immunization policies
 - ✓ promote an integrated approach for immunization issues vs. isolated ad hoc committees
 - ✓ Regional and subregional collaboration, path towards concerted/coordinated efforts against VPD





National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)

Useful Websites

WHO NITAG

[http://www.who.int/immunization/sage/
national_advisory_committees/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/immunization/sage/national_advisory_committees/en/index.html)

SIVAC Initiative

<http://www.sivacinitiative.org/>

<http://www.nitag-resource.org/>





Thank you

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