

Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) Regional Partners Meeting 15-16 March 2023 Kathmandu, Nepal



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Contents

- Contents 1
- Abbreviations 2
- Acknowledgements 3
- Background 4
- Objectives and Activities 4
- Discussion Topics 5
 - Country partners’ strengths and area of expertise 5
 - Issues and challenges with GOARN engagement 5
 - Major constraints in deployment 6
 - Reasons for countries not requesting support 6
 - Partner contribution to GOARN functions 6
 - Expectations from WHO 7
 - Action points from partners 7
- Way forward 8
- Conclusion 8
- Appendices 9
 - Appendix 1: Program 9
 - Appendix 2: List of participants 12

Abbreviations

HITAP	Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program
HIU	HITAP International Unit
HTA	Health Technology Assessment
GOARN	Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network
FETP	Field Epidemiology Training Program
LMICs	Low-and-middle income countries
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NUS	National University of Singapore
SEARO	South-East Asia Region Office
SCOM	Sub-Committee
SOP	Standard operating procedure
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
WHO	World Health Organization

Acknowledgements

This report summarizes the participation of Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) of regional partners hosted by World Health Organization (WHO) between 15-16 March 2023 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Two representatives from Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP) were invited to attend this meeting.

We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Sugandhika Perera, Dr. Partha Pratim Mandal, Ms. Mona Sharma, and others WHO officers for the invitation to attend this meeting and the administrative assistance throughout. The meeting participation of two HITAP staff was supported by the WHO as per Organization's policy.

The report has been prepared by Ms. Kanchanok Sirison and Ms. Annapoorna Prakash, HITAP. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding or participating agencies.

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Background

The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) is a network of more than 250 technical institutions and networks globally that respond to acute public health events with the deployment of staff and resources to affected countries, coordinated by World Health Organization (WHO). Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP) has been GOARN partner since 2020. Through this collaboration, HITAP and the National University of Singapore (NUS) conducted a study on assessing the trade-offs in efficiency and equity of contact tracing for COVID-19, using a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE). As part of this initiative, a framework was developed for contact tracing that can be applied to LMICs in both Asia and Africa. Since then, HITAP has engaged in the ‘*Strengthening public health surveillance and risk assessment for health security threats in WHO South-East Asia Region*’ meeting which was held in Bangkok, Thailand between 27 to 29 September 2022.

Ms. Kanchanok Sirison and Ms. Annapoorna Prakash, Project Associates from the HITAP International Unit (HIU), HITAP, attended this meeting which was held in Kathmandu, Nepal between 15-16 March 2023. This report provides an overview of the South-East Asia Regional GOARN. The meeting was organized by the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office, New Delhi. The supporting information is provided in the Appendices.

Objectives and Activities

The general objective of the meeting is to strengthen the engagement of current and potential regional GOARN partners to effectively respond to outbreaks. The specific objectives are:

- To facilitate dialogue and seed future collaborations among GOARN partners.
- To identify possible GOARN contributions to countries in the Region for improved outbreak alert, preparedness, and response.
- To showcase GOARN range of initiatives including capacity building and facilitated discussion around challenges relating to GOARN activities particularly deployments.
- To identify next steps and concrete plans of activities.

The activities listed are related to a conference or meeting focused on GOARN (Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network).

- **Session 1** provides a general overview of GOARN, including updates on global and regional activities and engagement experiences in Nepal.
- **Session 2** involves experience sharing from GOARN partners who conducted activities in SEAR (South-East Asia Region).
- **Session 3** focuses on the GOARN strategy and operations, including a discussion on the new GOARN Strategy 2022-2026, GOARN communications, operations, risk communication and community engagement, training and capacity building, and operations research.
- **Session 4** involves a group work activity to identify issues and challenges in GOARN engagement, as well as identifying support required to strengthen and expand the GOARN network in the region.

Presentations were delivered by experts and WHO officers on each of the specific topics from a variety of agencies and fields, including the general overview of GOARN, experience sharing session from GOARN partners conducted in SEARO and the new GOARN strategy 2022-2026. Group works were organized to identify issues and challenges in GOARN engagement to strengthen the GOARN

partnerships. All participants had the opportunity to discuss the criteria and pre-requisites for inclusion of Institutions for GOARN Network, GOARN membership (new and continuing) and streamlining deployment process (GOARN and WHO).

After each presentation, there was an interactive discussion period to facilitate exchange of experiences and perspectives between the partners. The agenda for the meeting can be found in Appendix 1: Agenda and the list of participants in Appendix 2.

The meeting also provided an opportunity for HITAP to learn about the deployment and other activities of GOARN and build networks.

This report provides a summary of the workshop, meetings with partners and the result documents are provided in the Annexures (agenda available in Annex 1, participant list available in Annex 2 and photographs available in Annex 3).

Discussion Topics

The presentations and discussion topics broadly fell into five areas: Country partners' strengths and area of expertise, issues, and challenges with GOARN engagement, major constraints in deployment, partners contribute to GOARN functions, expectations from WHO and action points. All participants were divided into four groups:

Group 1: Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia

Group 2: Thailand

Group 3: India

Group 4: Bhutan, Nepal

Selected topics from each of these areas presented by all four groups are briefly summarized in the following sections.

Country partners' strengths and area of expertise

Each country expressed that they have various strengths in the areas of epidemiology, surveillance, case management, operational research, laboratory expertise for both animal and human health, academia, immunization expertise, risk communication and community engagement, infection prevention and control, water and sanitation hygiene, diverse stakeholders, and previous deployment experience. These strengths are crucial in ensuring the success of collaborative efforts and addressing global health challenges. By leveraging these strengths, GOARN and its partners can effectively respond to outbreaks and emergencies, conduct research, and develop effective interventions to improve public health outcomes.

Issues and challenges with GOARN engagement

The issues in engaging with GOARN include the sensitization of the authorities, limited awareness of GOARN outside of partners, inadequate information about GOARN activities, lack of stakeholder meetings, visa processing, language and cultural barriers, logistics, and the absence of a secretariat focal point at the country level. These issues can hinder effective engagement with GOARN and impact the success of collaborative efforts. Addressing these issues is crucial in ensuring that countries can effectively engage with GOARN and leverage its resources and expertise to respond to outbreaks and emergencies, conduct research, and develop effective interventions to improve public health outcomes.

By working to address these issues, GOARN and its partners can strengthen their collaborative efforts and improve their ability to address global health challenges.

Major constraints in deployment

The major constraints in deployment through GOARN include longer bureaucratic processes, government and institutional concurrence (both to and from), lack of orientation about the deployment process, pre-requisites for visa processing, non-availability of human resources for the country if deployed, language and cultural barriers, financial support and logistics, capacity development and updating, and the long deployment process within the system, including the length of the deployment itself. These constraints can impede the timely deployment of experts to respond to outbreaks and emergencies, limiting the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. Addressing these constraints is crucial in improving the deployment process and enhancing the ability of GOARN and its partners to respond effectively to global health challenges. By working to address these constraints, GOARN can strengthen its capacity to respond to outbreaks and emergencies and improve public health outcomes.

Reasons for countries not requesting support

Countries may not request support from GOARN for several reasons, including ethical considerations, information considerations, legislation, and sufficient internal capacity. Ethical considerations may include concerns about the potential impact on the country's autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination. Information considerations may include a lack of awareness or understanding of GOARN's resources, processes, and activities, and the potential benefits of requesting support. Legislation may also play a role, as some countries may have legal or regulatory barriers that restrict their ability to request or receive external assistance. Finally, countries with sufficient internal capacity may not see the need for external support or may prefer to rely on their own resources and expertise to address outbreaks and emergencies. Addressing these barriers and promoting awareness of GOARN's resources and benefits is crucial in improving the uptake of external support and enhancing the ability of GOARN and its partners to respond effectively to global health challenges.

Partner contribution to GOARN functions

Partners can contribute to GOARN's functions in various ways, these could be identified as follows.

1. **Deployment:** Country partners can contribute by developing country-specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for deployment, identifying deployment areas and geographies, and ensuring the necessary official approvals are obtained within a specific time limit.
2. **Trainings:** Country partners can identify training needs, conduct training programs, and simulation exercises to strengthen preparedness. They can also offer twinning and short-term attachments to strengthen the capacity of their partners in the region.
3. **Research:** Country partners can identify research priorities, conduct community-based research, collaborate with partners on operational and genomic surveillance, and develop diagnostics, therapeutics, and kits for policy development.
4. **Community mobilization and engagement:** Country partners can support community mobilization and engagement activities during outbreaks.
5. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Country partners can strengthen existing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, including for outbreak management systems, immunization, and disease-specific programs.

6. **Sensitization:** Country partners can conduct sensitization programs for their partners, the Ministry, and WHO to create awareness and understanding of the role of GOARN in preparedness and response activities.
7. **Capacity building:** Country partners can participate in capacity building activities, including sharing their experiences and tools with partners to enhance preparedness and response activities.

The specific areas where country partners can contribute their strengths include epidemiology, laboratory capacity, biosafety, biosecurity, bio-risk management, outbreak investigations, joint orientation trainings for veterinary and medical professionals for outbreaks of zoonotic pathogens, clinical trials, ethics in biomedical research, digital platforms, and genomic surveillance.

The deployment areas and geographies for country partners are in South and Southeast Asia countries, as well as MEA partner countries.

Expectations from WHO

Country partners have identified several expectations from WHO in supporting GOARN's functions, including through its Country Offices, Regional Offices, Headquarters, Sub-committee, and Operational Secretariat Team. The Country Office is expected to provide orientation and update GOARN on current requests, share information about deployment, and support GOARN partners for deployment. The Regional Office is expected to facilitate networking between partners, while HQ is expected to frequently sensitize stakeholders and partners about GOARN's resources, processes, and activities. SCOM and OST are expected to work towards an easier process for the implementation of strategies, including deployment processes, funding, and flexibility of deployment. Additionally, WHO is expected to update and expand training materials, including organizational emails, to enhance the capacity of partners and stakeholders to contribute to GOARN's functions. By fulfilling these expectations, WHO can support GOARN's ability to respond effectively to global health challenges and improve public health outcomes.

Action points from partners

The GOARN partners meeting identified several action points that need to be taken to improve the network's effectiveness.

The immediate actions include developing clear legal arrangements, establishing a coordinating unit within WHO country offices, developing a clear protocol for deployment, updating the GOARN partners database, awareness and sensitization, developing a simple methodology for deployment, frequent engagements with partner institutions, developing requirements for becoming a member of the partnership, TOR discussion with host institutions, minimal requirements and validation of potential deployee, and updating institutes, focal points, and other announcements.

Medium-term actions include funding for training, research, and M&E, incentivization for institutions, cross-training between partners, experience sharing, publication of research, successful deployments, gap analysis, sharing of experiences/debriefing, capacity building, support for development of country SOPs, and facilitation of twinning/trainings in partner institutions.

Way forward

The next steps in addressing the challenges related to partner engagement in GOARN include several key actions.

Communication: It is essential to have regular communication and interactions with partners to ensure that they are informed and engaged in collaborative efforts.

Training and orientation: Organizing regular orientation for partners and potential partners can provide them with the necessary information and resources to be effective in their engagement.

Advocacy and political support: Advocacy with leadership levels in countries to support GOARN activities is also necessary to ensure the success of the collaborative efforts especially in countries where the national process of GOARN has not been established. Continuous advocacy and support by all three levels of WHO is also required.

Coordination: Supporting coordination and collaboration within partners and outside the network is essential, and partners can coordinate among themselves on operational research and FETP. Establishing a coordinating center within the country would help with national collaboration and fasten the deployment process.

Resource mobilization: Working on resource mobilization to support GOARN activities is necessary to ensure that there are sufficient resources to support the collaborative efforts. Exploring newer modalities of providing support, including remote support, buddy system, paired deployments, and others, is also essential.

Implementation: Finally, taking recommendations from this meeting to SCOM of GOARN, including ways to improve and formalize engagement and provide visibility, is necessary to ensure that the collaborative efforts are effective and sustainable.

By taking these actions, GOARN can address the challenges related to partner engagement and ensure the success of collaborative efforts in the future.

Conclusion

During the two-day meeting, it was identified that there are various challenges that need to be addressed in relation to the engagement of GOARN partners. One of the primary challenges is that partners have different levels of involvement, which can affect how well they collaborate. Some partners are not fully informed about the available resources, processes, and activities, which can cause misunderstandings. Some partners prefer a more formal engagement, particularly for significant deployments, which needs to be taken into consideration. Public agencies must follow specific procedures, which can also affect partner engagement. Limited financial and human resources are also a significant obstacle to better and more active engagement. Clear instructions on the orientation and duration of deployments are necessary to make the deployment process effective. To facilitate effective communication, partners should update their profiles on GOARN's website to ensure that their information is current and accurate.

Overall, it is crucial to address these challenges to enhance partner engagement and ensure that collaborative efforts are successful.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Program



Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) Regional Partners Meeting

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

Day 1: Wednesday, 15 March 2023		
08:30-09:00	Registration	
09:00-09:45	Inaugural Session	
	Welcome Opening Address Inaugural speech Objectives of the Meeting Introduction of participants and facilitators	WR, Nepal Chairperson, SCOM, GOARN Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal Sugandhika Perera, SEARO
09:45-10:15	Group Photograph and Tea/Coffee	
Session 1: General overview of GOARN (Moderator: Gail Carson)		
10:15 - 11:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global update on GOARN Activities Regional update on GOARN GOARN engagement - Nepal Roadshow experience Q&A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Armand Bejtullahu, OST Partha Mandal SEARO Samir Adhikari, HEOC
Session 2: Experience sharing from GOARN partners activities conducted in SEAR (Moderator: Armand)		

11:15-12:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • icddr,b • UK public Health Rapid Support Team • Empower School of Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lubaba Shahrin • Edmund Newman • Paul Lalvani
12.15 - 13.00	<p>GOARN deployments - country experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladesh • India • Indonesia • Thailand 	WHO Country Office Focal Points
13.00-14.00	Lunch	
Session 3: GOARN- Strategy and operations (Moderator - Dr Perera)		
14.00 -14:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New GOARN Strategy 2022-2026 Discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armand Bejtullahu
14:20-15:10 (Some presentations would be virtual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOARN communications – new GOARN Knowledge platform, website tec • GOARN operations • Risk communication and community engagement • Training and capacity building • Operations Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armand Bejtullahu • Gianluca Loi • TBD • Lisa Jansen / Sharon Salmon • Sarah Hollis
15:10 - 15:25	Health break Tea/Coffee	
Session 4: Group work to identify issues and challenges in GOARN engagement		
15:25-17:25	<p>Introduction to Group Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Work on partners strength and identification of issues and challenges • Identify support required to strengthen and expand the GOARN network in the Region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partha Mandal
17:25-17:30	Wrap up of the day	Rapporteur
18:30 -20:00	High tea and networking time	

Day 2: Thursday, 16 March 2023

08:30-08:40	Recap of Day 1	
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Session 5: Panel discussion – strengthening GOARN partnerships (Moderator: Dr Prakash Ghimire)		
08:40 - 09:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria and pre-requisites for inclusion of Institutions for GOARN Network • GOARN membership (new and continuing) • Streamlining deployment process (GOARN and WHO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armand Bejtullahu • Sugandhika Perera • Allison Gocotano • Rick Brown
9:20- 09:45 (Some presentations would be virtual)	GOARN Strategic Partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Medical Teams • Health Cluster • Pandemic Hub () 	Armand Bejtullahu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flavio Salio • Lind Doull/Emma Fitzpatrick • TBD
09:45 - 10:30	Continuation of group works	
10:30-10:45	Health break Tea/Coffee	
Session 6: Group Work presentation (outcomes from session 4) (Moderator: Sugandhika Perera)		
10:45 – 12:00	Presentation of group work	
12:00-12:45	Facilitated discussions with potential partners	SCOM, OST, WHO
12:45-13:30	Closing Session	
	Conclusion and Recommendations Closing remarks	Sugandhika Perera / Partha Mandal Gail / Armand HOEC, Nepal
13:30 – 14.30	Lunch followed by Networking time	
14.30 – 15:30	GOARN Clinic – Partners to sort out individual issues with OST and WHO Teams.	
15:30 onwards	Networking over tea/coffee	

Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN)

Regional Partners Meeting

15-16 March 2023, Kathmandu, Nepal

List of Participants as on 23 February 2023

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Appendix 3: Photographs



Group photo



Open discussion



Groupwork



Ms. Kanchanok Sirison and Ms. Annaporna Prakesh from HITAP