Leadership for a malaria-free Asia Pacific

Ensuring visibility, coordinated action and accountability
Contents

What is APLMA? .................................................. 1
Malaria elimination requires exceptional leadership ................. 1
Malaria elimination requires strong coordination .................. 2
Malaria elimination requires accountability to ensure progress .... 3
APLMA: Supporting regional coordination and progress .......... 4
What is APLMA?

The Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance (APLMA) provides Head of Government leadership to accelerate malaria control and elimination in the Asia Pacific. APLMA is led by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Viet Nam as Co-Chairs, and supported by the APLMA Envoy. Since its inception, APLMA has worked to accelerate progress towards eliminating malaria, to address the risks of inadequate financing and the multidrug-resistant malaria crisis. APLMA contributes to broader health security by improving regional cooperation against international health threats.

APLMA is supported by the APLMA Secretariat, led by the APLMA Envoy. The Secretariat works closely with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), with financial support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Malaria elimination requires exceptional leadership

Malaria elimination is unequivocally one of the ‘best-buys’ in global public health\(^1\). The disease is both highly debilitating and transmissible and the costs of indefinite malaria control are unsustainable. Malaria elimination requires an exceptional push that must be sustained even when the incidence of disease has been reduced to very low levels. Without strong leadership and support at the most senior levels of government, national malaria programmes will not achieve elimination. A multi-agency approach with strong leadership is crucial for success.

During the 9th East Asia Summit (EAS) held in November 2014, Leaders agreed that regional malaria elimination is necessary. In agreeing to the goal of an Asia Pacific free of malaria by 2030, Leaders affirmed that it is time to see the job through. Leaders requested the APLMA Co-Chairs submit to the 2015 EAS in Malaysia a plan for achieving this goal in line with recommendations from the APLMA Task Forces on Access to Quality Medicines and Regional Financing for Malaria.

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The APLMA Secretariat, in close consultation with government officials and key regional partners, is developing this plan – the APLMA Malaria Elimination Roadmap – for Leaders’ consideration at the 2015 EAS. The Roadmap calls for strong leadership to implement and maintain accountability for six priority actions that include:

1. Unite national efforts and regional action.
2. Map, prevent, treat and track disease, everywhere.
3. Ensure high quality malaria tests, medicines, nets and insecticides.
4. Improve targeting and efficacy to maximize impact.
5. Mobilize domestic financing and leverage external support.
6. Innovate for elimination.

**Malaria elimination requires strong coordination**

Successful elimination will require strong national commitment and effective collaboration from a wide range of actors including government agencies, health care workers, non-governmental partners, communities, the private sector and scientists. Each plays a critical role to ensure elimination is attained. However, strong and explicit support by Heads of Government is required to mobilize, coordinate, and sustain an efficient and effective multi-sectorial approach. Their engaged leadership and commitment will ensure that each constituency is endowed with the authority, resources and skills to deliver a region free of malaria.

Whilst the Ministries of Health and national malaria programmes execute elimination activities, Ministries of Finance will be crucial for ensuring sustained funding and deploying new types of financing to support elimination. Similarly, Ministries of Foreign Affairs will be essential for cross-border coordination and ensuring that migrant populations have access to prevention and treatment. In many countries, Ministries of Planning also play a key role on matters relating to strategic development, planning and programming, coordination and management of foreign aid, and monitoring and evaluation of national programmes.

Many Governments rely on external partners to support national efforts, through technical assistance and finance. Leaders should ensure that external partners align to national elimination plans to maximize impact. Technical and development partners need to align their support to national elimination plans and the APLMA Roadmap, and should consent to being coordinated by the Governments of malaria-endemic countries.

The private sector should work cooperatively with Governments to improve product quality, extend access to treatments and reduce prices.

The key role of Leaders is to drive collaboration by endorsing the Roadmap and ensuring that reliable arrangements are in place for it to be implemented. In each country, overall responsibility should be vested in a senior figure with a central coordinating role across government, who reports to the Leader. That person should take action to see that priority actions are advanced, progress is tracked and senior officials and agencies are held responsible for delivery and results.
The Roadmap proposes that each endemic country form a National Malaria Elimination Task Force [or similar body]. The senior central agency official mentioned above would chair this Task Force. The Task Force will ensure support and inter-ministerial coordination for elimination, by providing senior and central agency oversight.

Strong regional coordination will also be key in driving regional progress towards elimination. Malaria does not respect borders, so its elimination must be the aspiration of the entire region. Regional coordination is also crucial to reach migrant and mobile populations at risk. Non-endemic countries have a shared interest in malaria elimination to strengthen regional health security as a foundation of shared prosperity. To facilitate this coordination, the Task Force Chair from each endemic country will be joined by senior officials from non-endemic countries at an annual Senior Officials Meeting on Malaria Elimination. This meeting will be convened by the APLMA Envoy and will seek to strengthen inter-country cooperation, review shared progress and maintain regional momentum.

Malaria elimination requires accountability to ensure progress

At the Senior Officials Meeting on Malaria Elimination the National Task Force Chairs and officials from non-malaria endemic countries will work with the APLMA Envoy to review and closely monitor national and regional progress. They will do so using a common APLMA Elimination Dashboard and make recommendations in the form of Annual Priority Actions to accelerate regional progress. National Task Force Chairs will be responsible for implementing these recommendations within their national elimination efforts and ensuring that Heads of Government have full visibility on progress.

Leadership is critical for the delivery of the six priority actions outlined in the Roadmap. The APLMA Elimination Dashboard will track the implementation and impact of elimination priorities and measure progress towards the success of the elimination goal. It will support greater accountability during this effort by:

1. Tracking progress on the basis of each of the priority areas;
2. Identifying key areas deserving attention as Annual Priority Actions; and
3. Allowing full visibility of progress at both the national and regional levels.

The APLMA Secretariat and the World Health Organization (WHO) are developing the Dashboard, in collaboration with other key partners.

Regional progress will be reviewed during each Senior Officials Meeting using data collected routinely by the WHO as well as other published sources of information available from countries or partners. This information will inform key recommendations by the National Malaria Elimination Task Force Chairs. This process will ensure the Roadmap remains a living guide, by providing annual tracking, reporting and recommendations.
APLMA: Supporting regional coordination and progress

Without a common structure, the region faces risks of fragmented efforts in addressing malaria. An Asian Development Bank Report from August 2014 identified more than a dozen prominent organizations and initiatives addressing malaria in the region, with considerable overlap, duplication and confusion of mandates.² The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit, the EAS, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Pacific Island Forum, Melanesian Spearhead Group, WHO Southeast Asia Regional Office (SEARO), and WHO Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) all intersect across parts of the 22 malaria endemic countries of Asia Pacific.³ This crowded space is a function of imperfect existing arrangements. There is a need for much stronger regional health coordination and governance.

Since its inception, one of APLMA’s objectives has been to bring greater coherence and coordination to existing and future regional efforts. Improving regional coordination is a key concern for Heads of Government to consider, and therefore part of APLMA’s mandate. To ensure Leaders’ wishes are carried forward regionally as well as nationally, the APLMA Envoy will serve as the Leaders’ Envoy, to encourage greater collaboration and coordination and to maintain momentum towards malaria elimination.

The APLMA Secretariat will support a unified regional effort: it will convene meetings, support technical partners in building the evidence base, share lessons learned, and advocate for malaria elimination. In doing so it will convene panels and task forces as appropriate.

Heads of Government and regional partners can strengthen elimination efforts by becoming advocates of improved health security and by investing in regional public goods (RPG). The notion of RPG is frequently applied to articulate those services for which it is mutually beneficial to pool resources. In malaria elimination, the RPGs are clear and with a mandate from the EAS, and the APLMA Secretariat will support these. Examples of RPG that APLMA can promote include:

- **Leadership** – Building mutually reinforcing support for a common goal; convening and briefing to ensure shared concern and shared accountability. Primarily through convening regional and bilateral dialogue between nation states, but also ensuring leadership is recognized and rewarded. The APLMA Elimination Dashboard with its Annual Priority Actions will be an important vehicle of assessing regional progress.

- **Financing** – There is a need for sustained support in cash and in kind. The APLMA Secretariat will work with partners such as the ADB, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and others to ensure financing inputs grow and management systems are developed to simplify and sustain the effort.

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³ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, Timor Leste, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam and the Pacific countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.
• **Technical expertise and capacity building** – WHO has taken a leadership role in this area, and a number of other partners provide such support regionally. The APLMA Secretariat will promote and support better coordination and identify gaps, primarily through the annual Senior Officials Meetings and the APLMA Elimination Dashboard processes.

• **Regulatory standards** – Common standards are increasingly important to develop healthy, competitive markets. The APLMA Secretariat will work to support better coordination and harmonization of standards, using diplomacy supported by strong and compelling evidence to support reform.

• **Research and Development (R&D)** – The GMS has shown the value of intraregional research capacity around the threat of multidrug-resistant malaria. More broadly, the Asia Pacific R&D agenda has huge potential for implementing homegrown evidence-based products and actions to improve cost effectiveness and timeliness of implementation. Much of the R&D financing to address the Asia Pacific disease burden still comes from Europe and North America. The APLMA Secretariat can work with partners to ensure critical research needs are identified and financed.

To reduce the number of meetings associated with the number of actors, the APLMA Secretariat will seek support for an annual Malaria Week, with the potential to consolidate and reduce the number of regional meetings. Partners will be encouraged to convene in a single location during this week, drastically reducing the time and resources spent on meeting-related travel. A proposed structure for this week is to have separate technical, financing and policy components for discussions led by the key partners in those areas.
Membership of ADB and Regional Cooperation Organizations
Countries affected by malaria and membership of malaria related entities

Countries supporting APLMA

- United States
- Australia
- New Zealand
- Japan
- Russian Federation
- Brunei Darussalam
- Singapore

Malaria (22)

- Pakistan
- Timor-Leste
- Afghanistan

APMEN (18)

- Philippines
- Republic of Korea
- Thailand
- People’s Republic of China
- Indonesia
- Viet Nam
- Malaysia
- Cambodia
- India
- Lao PDR
- Vanuatu
- Solomon Islands
- Papua New Guinea

Other countries affected by malaria:

- Myanmar
- Bhutan
- Nepal
- Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
- Sri Lanka
- Bangladesh
- People’s Republic of China
- Indonesia
- Viet Nam
- Malaysia
- Cambodia
- India
- Lao PDR
- Vanuatu
- Solomon Islands
- Papua New Guinea
An Asia Pacific Free of Malaria by 2030