# LEARNING NETWORK FOR COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION

Assessment Report Executive Summary for LNCT Steering Committee (May 2020)

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## Executive summary

The Learning Network for Countries in Transition (LNCT) is regarded as a credible, objective source of information and support for countries transitioning away from Gavi support to full domestic financing of their immunization programs. Co-funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Gavi, LNCT serves as a platform for peer-to-peer learning among transitioning countries, by identifying and providing a repository for best practices learned during transitions and by amplifying and complementing Gavi partners' efforts, knowledge and expertise. LNCT provides a safe, neutral forum for countries to raise outstanding questions about their transitions LNCT also facilitates those concerns to be communicated and addressed by the Gavi Secretariat and its partners.

LNCT's work is guided by a strong set of country-centered principles. Network coordinators listen carefully to the needs expressed by member countries and design programs that help them learn from one another about how to address their needs. This peer-to-peer learning approach is recognized by stakeholders as a valuable innovation, helping countries contextualize lessons and apply them to their own situations more readily. It helps countries feel like they are not alone in making the complex and sometimes frightening transition to sustainability and provides them with an understanding of the "big picture" of sustainable financing and programmatic sustainability.

LNCT uses a blend of face-to-face and virtual modalities for reaching network members, including twinning and mentoring arrangements. LNCT maintains momentum with countries through a combination of online webinars, blog posts, discussion forums and newsletters to provide lessons learned about critical aspects of Gavi transitions. Those virtual learning opportunities are complemented by periodic in-person meetings that bring network members and partners together for intense experience sharing, skills-building and relationship-strengthening sessions that provide new information and plans for country teams to address critical tasks related to transition.

Since its launch in 2017, LNCT has established itself as a credible approach in the field of immunization. Equally important, the network is unique in that it is the only platform focused on the complicated issues of transition. Its innovative peer-to-peer methodology is a fresh, helpful approach that provides valuable support to Gavi's transitioning countries and to Gavi itself.

This assessment was conducted before the full scope of the COVID-19 pandemic could be known, and little information was available on the effect that COVID-19 will have on Gavi transitions. However, it is safe to say that many transitioning countries will face an increasingly difficult path to achieving self-sustaining status. On one hand, this will make LNCT's support even more important to its member countries; on the other hand, it means there is a sense of urgency for the network to continue its development of a robust set of virtual learning opportunities to offer country members, while reducing its in-person meetings in the short- to medium-term.

Rising to this test will require that LNCT address two types of challenges. A set of operational challenges will require the attention of the network's coordinators, and a second set of strategic

issues will require the attention of funders, coordinators and other stakeholders. The operational issues are:

- **Addressing difficulties of engaging participants in a continual learning process**. All learning networks find virtual engagement hard to implement and to evaluate. It is particularly difficult in LNCT's context, where participants' time constraints, internet access, language barriers and lack of comfort with online learning create barriers to engagement. Given the impact that COVID-19 will have on the network's programming, now is an opportune time for the network to clearly articulate its technical focus, to revisit its theory of change and to strengthen the metrics that it uses for evaluating the impact of its virtual engagements.
- **Strengthening connections to its member countries**. Country Core Groups (CCGs) comprised of EPI, MOH, and MOF representatives interact during LNCT engagements and provide key communication and coordination channels. While the CCGs in a few countries are high-performing and productive outside of LNCT in-person engagements, others find it challenging to maintain engagement and momentum. Researching options for strengthening the connections that LNCT has with its member countries would enhance its impact.
- **Guiding countries' learning.** Country members appreciate the information that LNCT makes available to them. At the same time, they are not always sure how to apply it to their own contexts. Providing its members with clear guidance on how to apply the technical information that it presents would be helpful to countries' learning process and potentially improve LNCT's impact in-country.

## I.   Observations & recommendations

Learning networks are long-term efforts. It takes time for government officials who work in weak health systems, with little "learning culture", limited access to internet, and siloed, hierarchical management structures to decide that a peer-to-peer, continuous learning model is a good idea. LNCT has succeeded in convincing country members that peer-to-peer learning is helpful, productive and relevant. The network is at a point now where it is critical for it to consolidate its niche, document its learning, strengthen its capacity to design, implement and evaluate virtual learning opportunities and examine its options for future financial sustainability. Taking those steps now will improve its ability to respond to the needs of transitioning countries and potentially provide it with even more options for future financial sustainability. The following recommendations are made with those objectives in mind.

**Recommendation 1: Conduct a strategic planning process**

**Activity 1.1: Conduct a strategic planning process to clearly redefine the network's niche and focus.** This process will help LNCT clarify and solidify its core area of expertise, or "niche" and help it focus its efforts on implementing its learning model using virtual modalities. Key strategic questions related to LNCT's technical focus, its primary target audiences, its theory of change, and how it measures its success would be addressed.

**Recommendation #2: Strengthen LNCT's virtual support to transitioning countries**
Regardless of the options the network chooses as part of its strategic planning process, the network should allocate resources to ensure that it improves its connections at the country level. Ensuring that its virtual engagements are able to support country-centered, peer-to-peer learning approaches will become especially important as COVID-19 forces the cancellation of in-person meetings for the foreseeable future.

- **Activity 2.1:** Improve understanding of country-level contexts and learning needs
- **Activity 2.2:** Shift the focus of LNCT resources from an "information sharing" mode to a more guided "education and skills-building" mode
- **Activity 2.3:** Document lessons learned about transitions and use them to develop core set of learning materials
- **Activity 2.4:** Adapt core set of materials for use in e-learning modules and courses
- **Activity 2.5:** Develop clear, measurable metrics for evaluating the reach, outputs and outcomes of LNCT's virtual engagements