

Meeting Minutes of the 39th HIV/AIDS Technical Working Group (TWG) of BCCM

Time : 10:30 AM
Date : 30 May, 2024
Venue : NTP Conference room, Mohakhali, Dhaka
Participants : List attached (Annex 1)

Meeting agenda:


1. Presentation on verification of 4th generation HIV test kits and Duo test kits.
2. Report sharing of "SMI on the purchase and utilization of condoms among female sex workers in Bangladesh" conducted by Dept. of Population Science, Dhaka University.
3. AOB

The 39th Meeting of the HIV/AIDS Technical Working Group (TWG) of BCCM was convened on 30 May 2024 at 10:30 AM in the conference room of the National Tuberculosis Programme, located on the 1st Floor, TB Gate Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Md. Mahafuzer Rahman Sarker, Line Director of TBL & ASP and Chair of the TWG and was also honored by the presence of Dr. Sheikh Daud Adnan, Line Director (CDC).

A total of twenty-nine participants attended the meeting (See Annex-1: Participants List), including TWG members, core team members from ASP and NTP, as well as representatives from various organizations and institutes, along with consultants engaged in different assignments. Dr. Md. Abdul Wadud, Programme Manager of ASP and Member Secretary of TWG, extended a warm welcome to all participants and encouraged them to actively contribute to the specific agenda items. Meeting Chair Dr. Md. Mahafuzer Rahman Sarker briefed the importance of the agenda of the 39th TWG. He said that our HIV programme is utilizing the 3rd generation HIV test kits to diagnosed HIV cases in Bangladesh while most of the country already shifted to 4th generation that combined by antigen and antibody. Programme should not wait for long time to diagnosed any cases. Then he requested to Prof. Dr. Saif Ullah Munshi, department of virology, BSMMU to present the validation and verification proposal. He also said that since long time we are working with BSMMU for validating and introducing different new technologies in the country. Based on the experience, we requested to develop a verification protocol for 4th generation HIV test kit and duo test kit.

Agenda-1: Presentation on Verification of 4th Generation HIV Test Kits and Duo Test Kits

Prof. Munshi presented the background and objectives of verifying 4th generation HIV test kits and Duo test kits. The primary objective is to identify optimal combinations of HIV serology tests, including those detecting HIV and syphilis, for implementing WHO's HIV diagnosis strategy in



Bangladesh. He outlined the methodology, including study population, sample size, sample site, test candidates, testing and verification procedures, data management, and analysis. The study will be conducted in three phases: Preparation, Execution, and Pilot. Once these test kits are validated, BSMMU also prepare a new testing algorithm for the country. He expects, they will submit the final report in February, 2025 if they can start the study in 1st July, 2024. The detail methodology and sampling techniques is attached with the minutes in PPT form.

Discussions and Decisions:

1. Dr. Md. Mahafuzer Rahman Sarker requested the BSMMU team to expedite the study's implementation and consider reducing the timeline. Because country has to plan for procurement of those validated test kits. Prof. Munshi explained that the timeline follows WHO protocol but assured that primary results will be shared as soon as possible. He also requested ASP to expedite the formalization of administrative processes.
2. Dr. Sheikh Daud Adnan suggested removing the "Check NOW HIV SELF TEST" from the candidate list. Prof. Munshi agreed to replace it after consulting with ASP and the Global Fund.
3. Dr. Rupali Sisir Banu suggested including a TB program implementation site for blood sample collection during the execution and pilot phases. The study team has agreed to do so if they get access for sample collection. She also emphasized to reduce the total study time, if require sample sites and manpower can be increased.

Decision: The TWG approved the protocol for "Optimizing HIV Testing Algorithms for Bangladesh" with the necessary changes (like sampling site and timing) and requested BSMMU to submit the revised protocol incorporating feedback to ASP within seven days. Considering the previous experience in validating different types of test kits and strong back ground on HIV/AIDS, TWG recommended to select Virology Department of BSMMU to conduct the study.

Agenda-2: Report Sharing of "SMI on the Purchase and Utilization of Condoms among Female Sex Workers in Bangladesh"

The study team presented findings on the purchase and utilization of condoms among female sex workers in Bangladesh under the PR- Save the Children. The report provided valuable insights into the purchasing behaviors and utilization patterns of condoms among this demographic. PPT is attached.

The program titled 'Prioritized HIV Prevention and treatment services for Key Populations in Bangladesh' is a HIV prevention program focused for the female sex workers (FSWs). The program distributed condoms among FSWs using two modalities: free and social marketing initiatives (SMI). However, the program implementation experience shows that the program could distribute fewer condoms using the social marketing initiative (SMI) approach than expected. In such circumstances, the program felt it necessary to assess the effectiveness of the SMI approach. To investigate this, the current study applied a mixed-methods approach using quantitative and qualitative data.



Key findings:

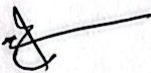
- Among the respondents, 97.7% of the FSWs used condom at least once in the last month, however, consistent condom use was very poor among every types of FSWs (for example, only 4% of hotel based FSWs used condom every time while having transactional sex in the last month.
- Street based FSWs has the highest frequency in purchasing condoms through SMI, Overall, 63.52% FSWs ever bought condoms through SMI. Only 26.13% FSWs preferred buying condoms through SMI.
- Majority of the respondents reported larger availability of condoms through SMI is the main reason for buying preferring SMI. Economic burden and quality of condoms were the main reason for not buying from SMI. Qualitative findings showed fixing a price of 0.50 BDT to maximum 2 BDT per condoms can facilitate the purchasing practice of SMI condoms.
- Current program increased the awareness level of the beneficiaries and increased their condom utilization. Integration of such program with government stakeholders can increase the demand and supply side participation.
- The findings suggest that the dual modality of running free condom distribution and distribution through SMI should be revised and just one single modality should be implemented.

Discussions and Decisions:

1. TWG members discussed various aspects of the study findings and recommendations.
2. The recommendations will be useful for current implementation and future intervention design for female sex workers.
3. Line Director, TB L and ASP said that this is a good approach, long time free condom is not good always
4. ASP will share the study report with TWG members for review and feedback.

Agenda-3: Utilization of Available HTS Kits

The ASP and NTP team members discussed the utilization of some short-expired 4th generation HIV testing kits and Duo test kit. Dr. Sheikh Daud Adnan, Line Director (CDC) proposed that the kits can be utilized in the blood screening program. The TWG members agreed for using these kits in the blood screening program.

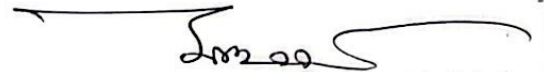


Decision:

ASP and NTP will discuss this suggestion with the Global Fund to obtain necessary approval for utilizing the short-expired 4th generation HIV testing and Duo test kits in the blood screening programme.

Closing Remarks:

Dr. Md. Mahafuzer Rahman Sarker thanked Dr. Sheikh Daud Adnan, Line Director (CDC), all TWG members, participants, and experts for their valuable contributions and decisions during the meeting. He concluded the 39th Meeting of the HIV/AIDS Technical Working Group (TWG) of BCCM with thanks to all attendees.



Dr. Md. Mahafuzer Rahman Sarker^{10, 06, 24,}
Line Director, TB- L and ASP, DGHS
&
Chair, TWG (BCCM).

