

## The Global Elimination or Eradication Acceleration Review (GEAR) Case Study on Onchocerciasis Elimination

### Introduction to GEAR

The [WHO 2030 NTD Roadmap](#) targets twelve diseases for elimination or eradication (E&E). To be successful in this next decade, the neglected tropical diseases (NTD) community will need to take a proactive and critical look at past experiences (both successes and failures), improve learning across the diseases and programs and build tools to help identify weaknesses to build stronger programs. The GEAR process and associated tools have been designed to facilitate this critical thinking and reinforce continuous learning to support all twelve NTD E&E programs included in the WHO Roadmap as well as other disease E&E programs to stay on track to achieve their goals.

The GEAR process was designed by a small team from [Global Institute for Disease Elimination \(GLIDE\)](#) and [Bridges to Development](#). The work began with the development of a ‘[white paper](#)’ which reviewed what has and has not worked for other disease elimination and eradication efforts and identified seven key risks to disease E&E programs. These findings were analyzed and put forward as a potential tool to review and identify opportunities to strengthen programs. This concept was presented at the Coalition for Operational Research on NTDs (COR-NTD) Annual Meeting (October 2020). During this meeting, onchocerciasis was suggested as the first disease to pilot the GEAR evaluation.

The GEAR process provides the framework and tools needed to support teams to solicit and analyze feedback from across the broad community of stakeholders involved in a disease E&E program through surveys, focus groups and interviews. With the help of a disease expert group and an independent advisory group, the findings from the review process, including the identification of strengths and risks to the program reaching E&E goals, are shared back to the disease community to take forward for strategic improvement and increased impact.

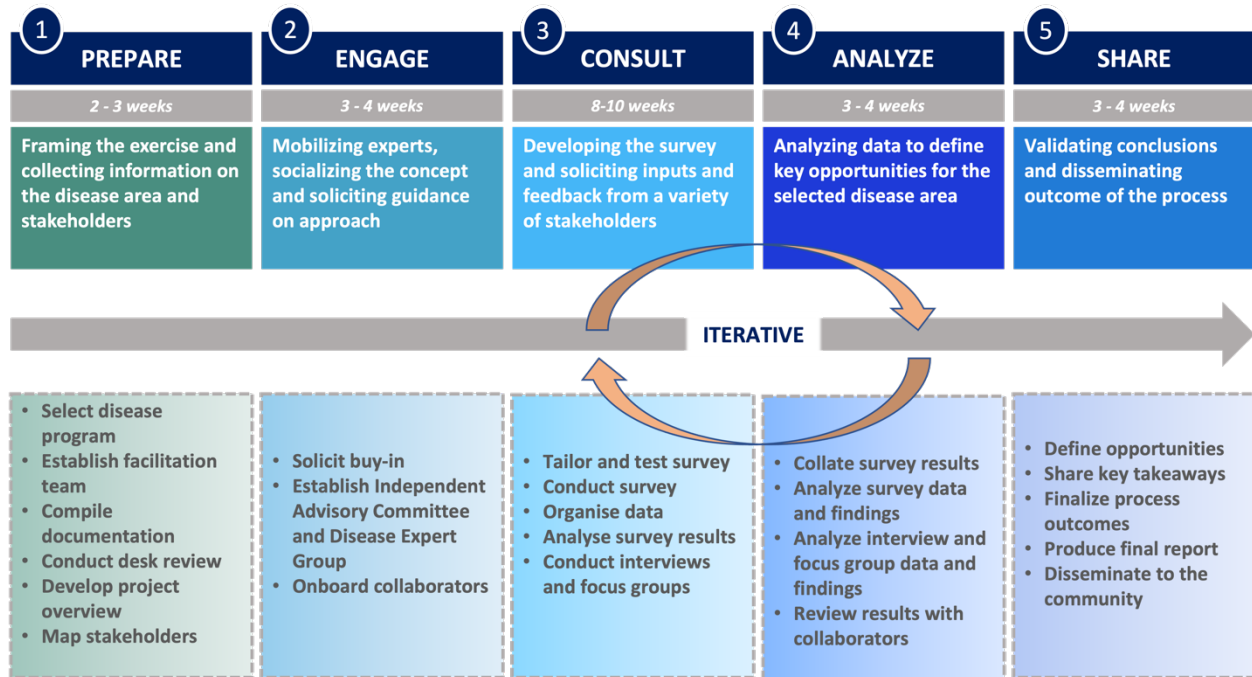
Ultimately, the purpose of the GEAR process is to improve and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of disease elimination and eradication efforts through applying an independent review and evaluation framework.

### The GEAR Pilot with Onchocerciasis

From **June 2021** to **May 2022**, the project team designed and tested the GEAR process and tools with the onchocerciasis community. During that collaborative effort, the team developed and carried out:

- a **survey questionnaire** covering several facets of disease elimination
- and a series of **interview protocols** for key informant and focus group interviews;
- **an independent review process** drawing on an independent advisory group and engagement with a representative group of subject matter experts at various stages of the process
- a **synthesis of early learning and tools** for the GEAR process for use in other elimination and eradication efforts.

The GEAR process includes five steps, which are detailed in the GEAR process guide for use by other disease programs in future.



### Outcomes:

Following the steps above, the GEAR process identified opportunities and associated actions for the oncho disease community to take forward, supporting progress towards the elimination goal.

The GEAR process identified key assets of the oncho community:

- dedicated partners with extensive experience to share;
- common understanding of program gaps and weaknesses across stakeholders;
- shared desire to build a stronger partnership and leadership;
- opportunities/lessons to learn from the heterogeneity of the program approaches over the last few years.

Building on these program strengths, consensus emerged for community action in the following areas:

- establishing a coordinated global level partnership;
- updating a strategy for oncho elimination; and
- developing a harmonised research agenda.

The GEAR Oncho pilot concluded with a presentation of findings to the disease community on June 13, 2022.

In addition to sharing the oncho specific feedback from the GEAR evaluation, the team also shared the GEAR process guide and tools developed along the way with the NTD community. These resources are

available to other disease programs interested in strengthening their elimination or eradication program.

## GEAR Tools:



### GEAR process Guide

- guiding principles
- step-by-step descriptions
- detailed sub-tasks
- expected outcomes
- tips based on our early lessons learned



### Links to resources

Examples and templates developed during 2021-22 with oncho available for tailoring to other disease areas

## Next steps:

The team will explore future opportunities to share the GEAR framework and findings from the Oncho Elimination Pilot and to hear from the community suggestions for other disease programs that may wish to implement the GEAR process. As was discussed with the GEAR Independent Advisory Group, next steps may also include engaging with the International Task Force for Disease Eradication to discuss future applications of GEAR in relationship to their work.

The World Health Organisation was kept engaged and informed throughout the entire GEAR process. Under new leadership of the Global Onchocerciasis Elimination program, WHO will now build on the GEAR findings in support of the 2030 Roadmap to guide the next steps in strengthening the oncho elimination efforts with the disease community. The GEAR team worked with the WHO to organize the outputs of the GEAR process into two workstreams - program and partnership. The GEAR team hopes that the findings will be helpful and supportive of WHO and the oncho community accelerating progress towards disease elimination and the team looks forward to hearing how the GEAR process could be improved to help support other disease programs in the future.