

Forming a Country Countdown Organising Committee and Working Groups

National Countdown Organising Committee

Ideally, the Organising Committee will be part of or will link to an existing structure or group focused on national reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health strategy. For example:

- In Nigeria, the Core Technical Committee of the Nigeria Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (NPMNCH) oversaw the preparation of the national report and updated profiles.
- In Zambia, a high-level organising committee was formed with the Ministry of Health as chair. All working groups reported back to this main committee.
- In Senegal, the Organising Committee included delegates from the Ministry of Health as well as from international agencies.

In all three countries, government, UN, and NGO committee members who participated in global Countdown meetings were able to use their familiarity with the indicators, country profiles, process, and methodology to help lead the national efforts. Experience in Senegal suggests that the presence of international champions for RMNCH can add strength to Country Countdown efforts.

The Organising Committee may meet monthly, or more frequently when necessary, to review progress and to organise the national Countdown event.

Responsibilities of the Organising Committee might include the following:

- Setting up and overseeing working groups to undertake data preparation and analysis, profile development, document preparation, budgeting, communications, and event planning
- Advocating for the Countdown process with all relevant partners and ensuring that interested partners from all constituencies are represented in the Countdown planning
- Ensuring that all Countdown planning is well-coordinated and fits within the ongoing national health planning process
- Liaising with the global Countdown to obtain support when required
- Identifying and mobilising resources to carry out the Countdown process
- Reviewing and approving the findings and messages for development of the national report, national and sub-national profiles, and media releases
- Following up recommendations from national and sub-national discussions
- Planning for next steps in the national Countdown process

Scientific Working Group

Membership of the Scientific Working Group might include the relevant MOH departments, including those responsible for health information, health research, and finances. Academics and research institutions, the UN agencies, international partners, and local NGOs and professional associations can all provide valuable input in reviewing and adding to the information required for the country profiles and for the subsequent analysis and findings. Having expertise on human resources, health financing, and equity analysis will be important. Members from a cross-section of regions and districts will bring a valuable sub-national perspective to the group.

Responsibilities of the Scientific Working Group might include the following:

- Reviewing available data
- Identifying additional data or research studies, especially from more recent surveys and any relevant sub-national data
- Analysing data, including comparisons with global Countdown data, looking at rates of change, comparing districts or regions, considering indicators based on different delivery methods, analysing coverage levels by income group, gender, etc.
- Linking with national or external experts, and possibly with the global Countdown team, to add more detailed analyses of equity, financial flows, or health systems and policies
- Preparing tables and graphs showing current coverage and trends
- Preparing the national and sub-national profiles with assistance from the Communications Working Group
- Assisting Communications Working Group with message development and media briefings
- Assisting with identification of topics and speakers for the national Countdown meeting

Events Working Group

Membership of the Events Working Group would ideally include members of the Ministry of Health, together with NGOs, members of Parliament, UN agency and donor partners, and professional associations. It would also be useful to include the private sector. Hiring a conference organiser can help to lessen the workload for the MOH and partners.

Responsibilities of the Events Working Group might include the following:

- Overall planning for the national Countdown conference, sub-national events, a media briefing, and a parliamentary briefing
- Identifying and inviting participants
- Selecting and booking appropriate venues, seating, sound systems, etc.
- Developing a budget
- Preparing agendas
- Arranging tea/coffee breaks and lunches

Communications and Media Working Group

Membership of the Communications and Media Working Group might include the communications, advocacy, and/or health education staff of the Ministry of Health, the UN partners, and participating NGOs. Representatives of the media will also be important partners. Professional associations and academics can add a useful perspective.

Responsibilities of the Communications and Media Working Group might include:

- Developing messages to share with the public based on findings of the national and sub-national profiles and report
- Producing short briefings in partnership with the Scientific Working Group
- Assisting with the production of the national report and national and sub-national profiles
- Arranging for dissemination of reports, profiles, and other Country Countdown products to key stakeholders
- Arranging media briefings and press releases
- Arranging television and radio interviews
- Assisting with event planning and providing relevant communication materials
- Documenting the conference discussions and conclusions

Finance/Budget Working Group

Membership of the Finance/Budget Working Group should include a senior member of the Ministry of Health, donor partners, and UN and NGO officers. Additionally, including the private sector, a member of parliament, and a professional association representative will demonstrate wide commitment to the national Countdown effort.

Responsibilities of the Finance/Budget Working Group might include:

- Reviewing budget needs for the planned events and publications
- Identifying MOH and other national resources to meet budget requirements and identifying potential shortfalls
- Contacting donor, UN, NGO, and private sector partners to secure the necessary funding
- Accounting for funds and reporting to donors