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PRINCIPLES IN REPORTING ON SURVEILLANCE
OPERATIONS

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1. Introduction

For the complete understanding and appraisal of the epidemiological situation on malaria, certain information and data, collected and reported through surveillance operations, are essential to national malaria eradication services and also to the World Health Organization. Most of this basic information is obtained from investigations by the lowest echelons in the field and is passed on and consolidated through the various intermediate stages to zonal and headquarters levels of the national malaria eradication service.

For many reasons, such as geographical variations, different political divisions, etc., the organizational set-up of surveillance operations varies from country to country and it is practically impossible to develop a uniform system of reporting which would apply, without modification, to every national malaria eradication programme. However, some basic principles exist which must be reckoned with in the planning of an efficient reporting system. There are essential items of information to be collected and certain standard procedures to be effected in each and every malaria eradication service in order to facilitate a permanent assessment of the progress of the campaign and of the epidemiological situation of disappearing malaria.

It must also be realized that a reporting system includes not only the communication of results from echelon to echelon but also registration and presentation of the results.

As far as the basic principles are concerned there are three specific items which need to be reported or registered at regular intervals. These are:

- reporting on work performance and routeing of slides;
- action on and registration of confirmed malaria cases;
- presentation of coverage and case distribution.

The items of information requested in the quarterly report on surveillance operations designed by the World Health Organization are absolutely essential for any assessment. A reporting system will not be adequate unless it provides all the details which permit the completion of such a report.

2. Reporting on work performance and routeing of slides

The two main objectives of a reporting system in surveillance operations, which are the factual statements of the work performance and the routeing of the blood slides, are closely related to one another. The governing motives are, on the one hand, to collect regularly data on work carried out, in order to show the coverage by case detection or to give an account of other activities, such as supervision or laboratory services, and, on the other hand, to route the slides in the shortest possible time from the place of collection in the field to the laboratory.

The need for obtaining information on what has been done in the field, which is the first purpose of a reporting system as stated above, is generally realized, and in nearly every country with surveillance operations under way report forms of some kind or other exist to collect such data. The main subject on which performance reports are required is that of case detection methods. As case detection is the source of blood slides, the work performance and routeing of slides must necessarily be dealt with together.

When setting up this part of a reporting system, certain aspects must be borne in mind:

The first principle is that the forms should be as simple as possible, including all the essentials but avoiding any unnecessary information, so that they can be understood by the people intended to complete them who may have received little education.

Although the number of forms used in a malaria eradication programme should be kept to a minimum, the reporting of too many subjects, especially unrelated ones, on the same form should be avoided.

Slides must not be held up for any length of time, even one or two days, at any intermediate level purely for the purpose of completion of performance reports.

The supervisory personnel should be freed, to the largest possible extent, from any clerical work for the benefit of their function as field supervisors.

Any adding or calculations required on the report forms should not be done at field level but be carried out at offices which have statistical clerks and calculating machines.

It is advisable to provide space in which the supervisory staff can insert remarks or make comments.

3. Action on and registration of confirmed cases

With the progress of a programme towards malaria eradication the action that is taken on confirmed malaria cases, including their registration, becomes more and more vital to the campaign. It must be considered an essential requirement without which one cannot use the term consolidation phase. This action forms an entire system in itself and begins from the moment a slide is found positive, when an automatic chain of operations must start and be carried out with the greatest possible speed and reliability. The clearer and more detailed the provisions are for such a routine mechanism, the more reliable it becomes. Special provisions must be made for the treatment of the case, its epidemiological investigations and follow-up, and these must all be finally documented on the malaria case card, and a marginal punch-card for each malaria case must be prepared.

In many countries such a system has not yet been implemented or where it has, too little emphasis has been given to it and there is a lack of thoroughness in carrying it out.

A fully documented malaria case register is considered by the World Health Organization to be an essential requirement before the certification of malaria eradication can be considered, as it is only by such a register that proof of eradication can be furnished.

4. Presentation of coverage and case distribution

Figures are not always easy to absorb and understand and it is frequently more helpful to present the information gathered on the work performance and malaria cases in a visual form as well as in the various offices at field level and at headquarters. As adequate coverage of the area under consolidation is most important, it is of value to show on a chart the visits made to households and villages in weekly or monthly divisions depending on the routine. In branch or district offices such a chart should even show individual households, while at provincial or national headquarters the village as a whole should be the unit. With this kind of presentation it is possible to obtain a picture at a glance whether certain households in a locality or localities in an area have been omitted completely from case detection activities or whether houses or villages which have been missed are scattered in area and time. Such charts can either simply indicate the visit or can be of a more complex nature, showing at the same time the number of blood slides collected, malaria cases detected and even, by using different-coloured inks, the species of parasites found.

Likewise, wall maps on which the geographical distribution of the confirmed cases is marked are of value in order to show at once the location of problem areas or foci which may otherwise be more or less meaningless figures on paper to local staff. Such a presentation also permits easier assessment as to why the foci have occurred and how the situation can be remedied.

This visual presentation in the form of charts and maps can best be placed on walls where they are easily observable by all the staff concerned. Their completion and keeping up-to-date must be in the hands of a competent officer.

5. Other considerations in the planning of a reporting system

The preparation of a chart outlining visually the channels of communication of each form and card from the place of its origin to its destination will be of considerable assistance in the planning of a proper reporting system. This facilitates the study of possible shortcomings and improvements at the planning stage, and will also be of help in teaching how to implement and use a reporting system.

An example of such a chart is given as Appendix A, based on a reporting system proposed for the National Malaria Eradication Service in Iraq.

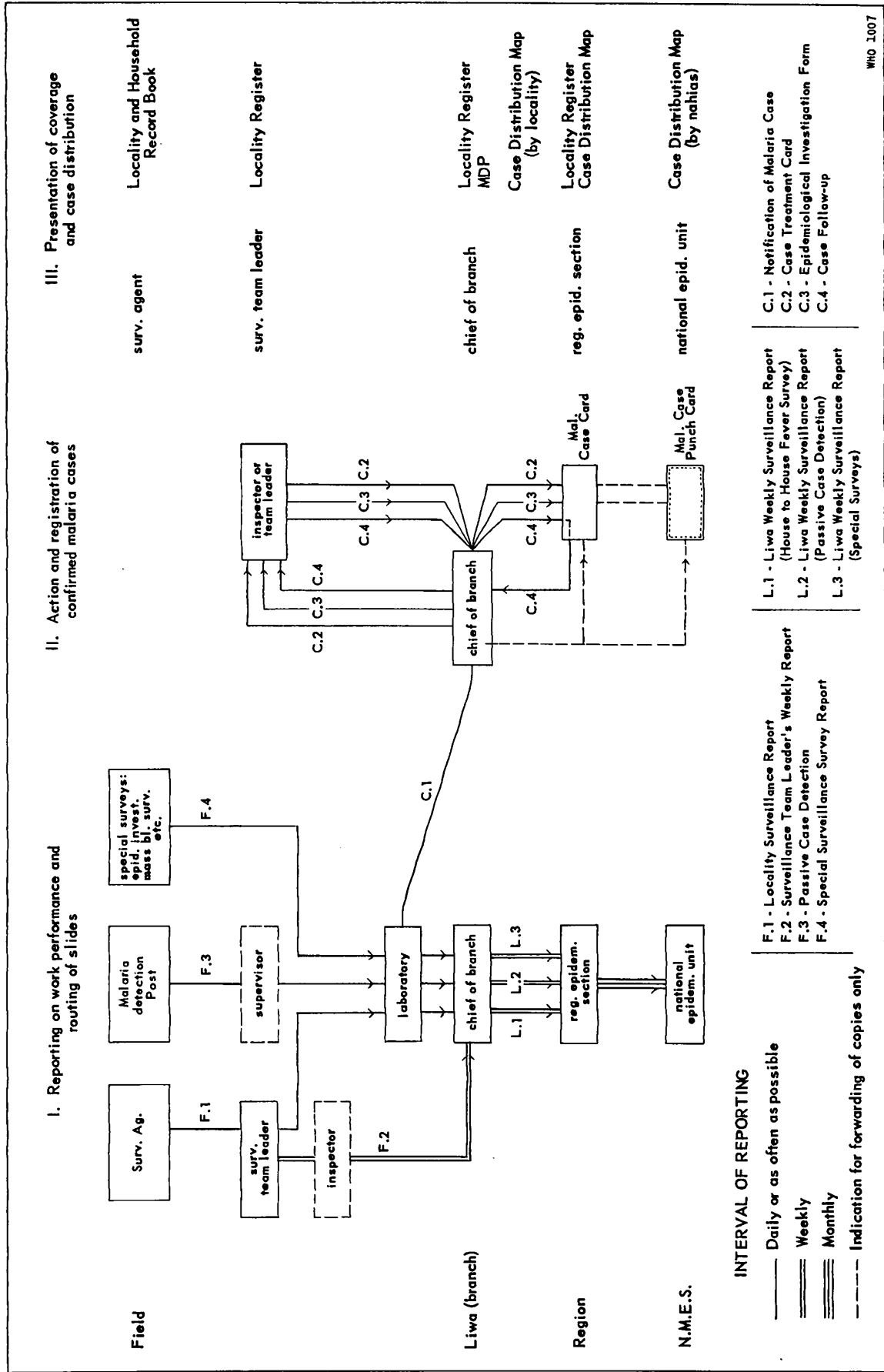
It may be felt necessary to have additional forms showing the number of visits and the work performance of the different levels of field supervisors. In that case the chart (Appendix A) can easily be enlarged to show the lines of communication for these forms.

The existence of a national Manual on Reporting will, without doubt, improve the quality of reporting and help towards a quicker understanding of the method of completion of the various forms. Such a manual should contain precise instructions for each form showing the person from whom it originates, the lines of communication, number of copies, time of completion, purpose, etc.¹

The discussion on the problems of local reporting and recording cannot be closed without commenting on a matter appearing trivial at first sight, but which has a serious bearing on the proper usage of the reporting system: this is the filing of the available information. It is valueless to collect data if they are handled in such a way that little use can be made of them. It is often painful to observe the trouble that has to be taken to find field reports which are required for the assessment of a malaria situation. This refers to offices at all levels. If the filing is inadequate the time wasted in the search for performance reports, as well as for information on confirmed malaria cases, is astonishing and one can never be sure if some of the relevant reports have not still been missed. The functions of a statistical clerk are primarily the compilation of data, checking and preparing of cumulative reports to the higher offices. If a great part of his time is spent in searching for data, this will obviously reflect on the quality of his proper work. It seems that this matter should not be neglected nor should the problem be minimized. Thus even filing deserves due consideration in the planning of a reporting system.

¹ An excellent example of such a manual is: Manual for Reporting Procedures and Records (Rev.1) - Malaria Eradication Campaign - Turkey 1961, June 1961 (Document EUR-TURKEY-23)

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FOR MALARIA ERADICATION PROGRAMME - REPUBLIC OF IRAQ



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