ESPEN Collect Services – Compilation Working Groups Discussion

1. Discuss various models for financial and technical support to ensure ESPEN Collect can provide quality at scale

1. Staffing and Service Continuity:

- **Expansion of Staff:** There is a recognized need to expand the staff dedicated to ESPEN Collect to ensure service continuity. However, this expansion might not be sufficient given the upcoming survey demands, which include needs in IT, analytics, and training.
- **Decentralized Training Support:** A decentralized approach to training, similar to the Tropical Data model, could be effective. This involves training country champions who can support national surveys and reduce reliance on centralized technical assistance.

2. Donor and Funding Strategies:

- **Commitment from Donors:** Donors and funding managers should be encouraged to commit to using ESPEN Collect, provided it is feasible for their projects. This commitment could help secure ongoing financial support.
- **Allocation of Survey Funding:** A portion of the funding allocated for surveys could be directed towards ESPEN Collect. This could be framed as an overhead cost necessary for the associated data management needs.
- **New Use Cases and Partner Support:** As new use cases for ESPEN Collect arise, partners could be called upon to provide financial support. Examples include integrating tropical data and specific funding for ESPEN Collect.
- **Partner Access to Data:** Allowing partners some level of access to the data could incentivize financial support. However, it's important to manage this carefully since the data belongs to the countries and not the partners.

3. Technical Support and Capacity Building:

- **Partner Support for Technical Capacity:** Leveraging partner support in-country could provide the necessary technical assistance for ESPEN surveys. Partners could help build the technical capacity required to use ESPEN Collect tools effectively.
- **Investment in Platform Support:** There's a question about whether to invest in iOS support for ESPEN Collect. Given the widespread use of Android devices, this might be deprioritized in favour of focusing resources on Android.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** There should be a focus on training Ministry of Health (MOH) M&E staff to use ESPEN Collect effectively. This includes financing their attendance at any ESPEN-related training sessions.

4. In-Country Focal Points and Data Management:

- **Country Focal Points:** Each country should identify a focal point responsible for configuring questionnaires and monitoring data quality throughout the surveys. This focal point would play a crucial role in ensuring data integrity and reducing the need for external technical assistance.
- **Training of Focal Points:** Funding should be secured for in-person training of these focal points in each country. This training would target administrators and data recorders, ensuring they have the skills needed to manage ESPEN Collect effectively.

5. ESPEN's Role in Capacity Building:

- **Technical Capacity Building:** ESPEN should focus on strengthening the technical capacities of country teams (both program staff and partners). This will reduce the demand for technical assistance during survey implementation, making the process more sustainable.

2. What is working well and what isn't working as well and what are the financial implications of improving the service

What Is Working Well:

1. **Tool Uptake and Usability:**
    - **Wide Adoption:** The broad uptake of the ESPEN Collect tool is recognized as a positive aspect, indicating its acceptance and use across different programs.
    - **Ease of Use:** The application is easy to use for data collection and submission, with features such as offline access and automatic generation of participant IDs being particularly valued.
    - **Offline Functionality:** The ability to use the application offline ensures that data can be collected even in areas with limited connectivity, and data can be uploaded later when a connection is available.
    - **Dashboard Availability:** A dashboard for monitoring data collection is available, which supports real-time tracking and management of ongoing surveys.

2. **Support and Accessibility:**
    - **Technical Support:** ESPEN has provided substantial support for new surveys, such as SCH practical precision assessment, ensuring the quality and accuracy of data collected.
    - **Data Access:** Easy and permanent access to collected data is a key benefit, along with the availability of hard copies of forms for data validation and backup.
    - **Tablet Funding:** ESPEN has funded the purchase of tablets for data collection in various countries, which has facilitated the adoption and use of the tool.
    - **Free Data Storage:** The service includes free data storage, reducing the financial burden on countries.
    - **Scalability:** The application is scalable, allowing it to accommodate the increasing demands of surveys.

3. **Process Efficiency:**
    - **Assistance Request Process:** The process for requesting assistance is straightforward, available online, and easy to follow.
    - **Technical Assistance:** The ESPEN team is available to provide technical assistance to countries during data collection, which helps ensure smooth implementation of surveys.
    - **Data Handling:** The tool supports offline data recording, which is critical in areas with poor internet connectivity, and it helps in the production of EPIRFs after surveys.

Issues and Suggestions for Improvement:

1. **Support Team Capacity:**

- **Insufficient Staffing:** The current team is insufficient to meet the growing demands for support, especially with the scale of upcoming surveys. This will likely affect the quality and timeliness of support, leading to potential delays and increased costs.
- **Staff Expansion:** There is a need to hire more full-time staff and have ESPEN personnel who can travel to provide in-country support. This would enhance the quality of support and ensure timely assistance during surveys.

2. **Technical and Communication Challenges:**
   - **Error Handling:** Challenges exist in getting timely responses from the ESPEN team when back-end updates or error fixes are required. The lack of real-time support can delay survey progress and increase costs.
   - **Communication Issues:** Both parties (ESPEN and country teams) often feel that they are waiting for feedback from each other, indicating a need for improved communication mechanisms.
     - **Solutions Proposed:**
       - **Ticketing System:** Implementing a ticketing system could streamline communication and ensure that issues are tracked and resolved efficiently.
       - **Portal for Reviews:** A dedicated portal for reviews could allow for faster feedback and resolution of issues, particularly for surveys implemented over weekends or outside regular working hours.

3. **Tool Customization and Independence:**
   - **Form Building:** Countries have expressed a desire to build forms themselves, which could reduce their dependence on ESPEN for specific dashboard configurations. Providing countries with templates or tools to create their own forms could empower them and reduce the load on ESPEN.
   - **Integration with National Systems:** There is interest in exploring ways to push results directly into national systems like DHIS2, which would allow countries to review data more timely and integrate it into their broader health information systems.

4. **Data Management and Security Concerns:**
   - **Server Access:** Limited access to the server during surveys has been highlighted as a concern, particularly when real-time adjustments are needed.
   - **Data Protection Laws:** As countries update their data protection laws, they may no longer allow personally identifiable information (PII) to be stored outside the country. This could impact how ESPEN Collect handles and stores data.
   - **Security and Compliance:** Ensuring compliance with national data protection laws and providing secure, localized data storage options may require additional investment and technical adjustments.

5. **Training and Capacity Building:**
   - **Lack of In-Person Training:** There is an absence of in-person training for focal points from programs and partners, which limits the capacity of local teams to manage the tool independently.
   - **Training Funding:** Providing funding for in-person training sessions in each country (for administrators and data recorders) would strengthen local capacity and reduce the reliance on ESPEN for ongoing support.

- **Country Independence:** Countries are currently dependent on ESPEN for specific dashboard creations, indicating a need to build local capacity for independent data management and visualization.

6. **Technical and Data Visualization Issues:**
   - **Metabase Map Utilization:** There have been difficulties in utilizing the site maps produced in Metabase, suggesting a need for improved training or tool enhancements.
   - **Dashboard Indicators:** Some indicators need to be configured to appear on dashboards, which requires technical adjustments and support.

Financial Implications:

- **Staffing Costs:** Expanding the ESPEN team and hiring additional full-time staff, including those capable of providing in-country support, will incur significant costs.
- **Training Investment:** Funding for decentralized and in-person training programs will require financial investment but is essential for building local capacity and reducing future support needs.
- **Technical Enhancements:** Addressing server access issues, enhancing communication systems (e.g., ticketing), and ensuring compliance with data protection laws will also involve additional costs.
- **Tool Customization:** Developing templates or allowing countries to independently build their forms and dashboards may reduce some support costs but will require upfront investment in tool development and training.

3. Discuss and share experience from partners' perspective and countries' perspective on the ESPEN Collect survey support service (registration process, training, setup, implementation, data management, access to data, EPIRF generation, integration of lab data, integration with external systems)

From the Partners' Perspective:

1. **Registration Process:**
   - The registration process is generally perceived as timely and efficient. Once the report is submitted, the registration is immediate, ensuring that the survey can proceed without unnecessary delays.

2. **Training and Setup:**
   - **Training:** Training is provided to country staff, who then train fieldworkers using a Training of Trainers (ToT) model. However, the lead time for training can be long, typically taking 2-3 months. This can delay the start of surveys, especially if in-person training is required, which adds additional time.
   - **Setup:** The setup process is dependent on the review of protocols and ethical clearance, both in the country where the survey is planned and within WHO AFRO. This can lead to delays in implementation.

3. **Implementation and Data Management:**
    - **Implementation:** While the implementation of ESPEN Collect is generally good, there can be delays in feedback on submitted data, which can slow down the overall process. Data management during the survey is also reported to be effective.
    - **Access to Data:** Partners appreciate the easy and permanent access to collected data. However, there are concerns about the lack of real-time access to data during the survey, which limits the ability to make timely adjustments.

4. **EPIRF Generation and Integration:**
    - **EPIRF Generation:** The ability to generate the EPIRF using ESPEN Collect is seen as a positive feature. This functionality is useful for summarizing and reporting survey results.
    - **Integration with External Systems:** While the integration with external systems is noted as good, there is little experience reported in this area. Integration into HMIS systems is highlighted as a potential benefit that could improve data utilization and accessibility.
    - **Integration of Lab Data:** There is a suggestion to integrate data related to entomological and epidemiological surveys more effectively within the system.

5. **Suggestions for Improvement:**
    - **Communication:** There are issues with communication, where both ESPEN and country teams feel they are waiting for feedback from each other. A possible solution could be the implementation of a ticketing system or a review portal to streamline communication.
    - **Data Ownership:** There is a sense that NTD programs lack ownership of their data, as they are only able to "view" but not fully "access" it. Countries desire more control over their data, and there are suggestions to develop a model where data remains in-country, with ESPEN accessing it via an API rather than storing it externally.
    - **Country-Led Coordination:** Partners propose establishing a coordination group led by the Ministry of Health, similar to the Oncho Elimination Committee, to enhance country ownership. The idea of creating ESPEN country entities, such as ESPEN Nigeria, is also suggested to facilitate this model.

6. **Financial Implications:**
    - **Training and Support Costs:** The long lead time for training and the need for in-person sessions add to the financial costs. Expanding staff and ensuring more timely feedback and data access would also require additional funding.
    - **Sustainability Model:** As countries implement stricter data protection laws, there will be financial implications for developing and maintaining systems that keep data within national borders while still enabling ESPEN's oversight and support.

<u>From the Countries' Perspective:</u>

1. **Registration Process:**
    - The registration process is seen as efficient, with immediate action once reports are submitted.

2. **Training:**
    - While the training provided is beneficial, there is a preference for in-person training over virtual sessions. Countries have suggested that training should be more frequent and better adapted to their specific needs, including receiving certifications for the trained personnel.

3. **Setup and Implementation:**
    - The setup process is adapted to the survey protocol, but delays related to ethical clearance are a concern. The use of QR codes is noted as a helpful feature for matching field data with lab data.
    - **Implementation:** While generally good, there is sometimes a delay in receiving feedback on the data submitted, which can slow down the survey process.

4. **Data Management and Access:**
    - Countries generally find data management to be good, but there is frustration over limited access to data during surveys. There is a suggestion to share dashboards with other stakeholders beyond those who currently have full access to the data.

5. **EPIRF Generation and Integration:**
    - The generation of EPIRF is positively received, but there are concerns about delays in obtaining results from lab samples, particularly for onchocerciasis (OV) surveys.
    - **Integration of Lab Data:** There is a call to better integrate lab data, especially for entomological and epidemiological surveys, into the ESPEN system.
    - **External System Integration:** While some countries report good experiences, others have no experience with integration, indicating a need for further exploration and development in this area.

6. **Challenges and Suggestions:**
    - **Ownership and Data Control:** Like partners, countries are concerned about the lack of full control over their data, especially with emerging regulations that restrict data storage outside the country.
    - **Improving Real-Time Support:** The need for real-time support is critical, as delays in receiving feedback can increase survey costs and affect data quality.
    - **Country-Specific Coordination:** The idea of forming ESPEN country entities or coordination groups led by the Ministry of Health is supported, as it could enhance country ownership and ensure that survey processes are better aligned with national priorities.

7. **Financial Implications:**
    - **Cost of Training and Setup:** The extended time required for training and setup, particularly with the need for ethical clearance, adds to the financial burden. There is also a need for investment in systems that can operate within the constraints of national data protection laws.