

Future Directions and Strategies of WHO/SEARO

By Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, Regional Director. His message to WHO Country Representatives, 8 March 2004

1.
 - All RDs when take office will make changes in policy and organization of their Regional Offices. This is to ensure the fulfilment of their promises made with the Member States.
 - In my case, only necessary reorientations of such policy and organization are made.
 - In this context, I believe that we can improve efficiency and effectiveness of our work if we do what we are expected to do or we do what we should do.
 - Therefore, I am encouraging all of us to understand thing rightly, do the right thing at the right place and at the right time.

2.
 - We will continue implementing the workplans of our programme budget, 2004-2005.
 - But, necessary changes in the course of this implementation may have to be made to ensure our best support and services to the Member Countries.

3.
 - We will review our regional functions to ensure that we understand thing rightly, and do the right thing at the right place and at the right time.

4.
 - Now, let us look at our functions. We may see these in two main categories:
 - Normative, and
 - Direct support to individual countries

5.
 - Normative function is to be primary responsibility of the Regional Office.
 - The Regional Office staff is to ensure the development of norms, standards, guidelines, manuals and training modules, among other things, for regional use, for application at the country level.
 - In developing these, information from countries will be primarily used. Information generated and collected through our work at the country level will be the inputs for normative work.

6.
 - Direct support to individual countries is the primary responsibility of the respective WHO Country Representatives and their staff.
 - WRs are matured professionals. They can make effective decisions in this respect.
 - In pursuing this responsibility, WRs will get strong back up from the Regional Office as required.

7.
 - The division of these two categories of functions is for managerial clarity only.
 - In this connection, I must underline that these functions are not mutually exclusive.
 - The Country and Regional Office staff will have to work together coordinatedly and cooperatively at all times any way.

8.
 - Now, let us look at the situation at country level, the interface between Government and WHO which is the most important area in our work, must be thoroughly reviewed and understood, such as:
 - Government / WHO coordination (Management) mechanism
 - Health profile, policy, programme and plan
 - Managerial practices, rules and regulations

We need to be very well-verse with our management Manual and Handbook

 - Political and socio-economic situation and climate in countries.

We have to be psychosocially and politically very sensitive to the local situations, while trying not to get involved in the local politics.
 - I must emphasize the importance of Government / WHO Coordination Mechanism which is tool for the implementation of our collaborative activities in countries.
 - This mechanism should be made multisectoral, as much as possible.

9.
 - Now, let me touch on the functions of WHO Country Representative, he or she is:
 - Technical Advisor in health to Government. Therefore, WRs have to be technically competent;
 - Manager of WHO country programme budget, WRs must be thorough with their programme budgets;
 - Coordinator for all inputs to health development in their respective countries, these inputs will come from various sources, in addition to WHO;
 - Representative – WRs are representatives of Director-General and Regional Director, therefore, they must have diplomatic and political quality, in addition to technical and professional competence;
 - Leader to mobilize resources for country health development, these resources include at least budgetary, information and expertise.

10.
 - Since our countries are not rich to be resource independent, therefore resource mobilization is one of our highest priorities. With its importance, I place this function rightly under my Deputy Regional Director.
 - We will pursue in a big way in resource mobilization, at both country and regional levels.
 - WRs will be strongly encouraged and fully supported in their efforts in this regard. We will work coordinatedly and closely together in pursuing this function.

11.
 - In this context, I would like to underline the importance of mobilizing expertise which is available in the countries of our Region.
 - We will have to review the existing mechanisms for such mobilization, and strengthen them to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.
 - These are particularly the network of WHO Collaborative Centres and National Centres of Expertise, Expert Advisory Panels and Committees, WHO Reference Laboratories and WHO Reference Centres in various areas, Advisory Committee for Health Research, Technical Advisory Groups and Scientific Working Groups in specific technical subjects.

12.
 - In this connection, we have to develop or strengthen our data and information base at country and regional levels.
 - WRs' offices and technical units at the Regional Office have to develop and maintain up-to-date inventory and profile of centres of excellence and centres of expertise, as well as of the individual experts for their use.

13.
 - We have to promote and support the development of national networks of these centres and individuals for efficient and effective utilization of countries' expertise.
 - Then, we can help link these national networks to be regional network for regional coordination and cooperation.
 - WR Thailand started mapping of national institutions and experts in the field of health in Thailand.
 - And he moved to develop national network of WHO Collaborating Centres and National Centres of Expertise.
 - These are commendable initiatives.
 - This experience may be learned by other WRs if they have not yet done so.

- 14.
- Specifically to WHO Collaborating Centres, we have to ensure their effective utilization for WHO's work.
 - We have to streamline the process to ensure efficient designation and re-designation of these centres.
 - I am now considering such designation and re-designation in two steps:
 - First, we will have a process to designate them to be regional collaborating centres for our own regional use.
 - Then, when conditions are fulfilled, we will proceed for them to be WHO Collaborating Centres for global use.
 - An appropriate mechanism to move forward in this direction is being contemplated.
 - Furthermore, we will identify centres of excellence and centres of expertise for designation in the priority areas of our work which still lack collaborating institutions.
 - At the same time, keep in mind, however, that any good institutions can always be used for WHO's work, even though they are not designated to be WHO Collaborating Centres.
- 15.
- Colleagues, today country technical capability and capacity have been increased considerably.
 - In our Region, many countries have acquired technical capability and capacity up to the level of self-reliance.
 - At the same time, other countries still need a lot of technical support and help.
 - We will promote intercountry cooperation to encourage and facilitate the transfer of expertise between these two groups of countries. We will move forward in a big way to help them to collaborate with each other.
 - This is one reason that I am very much encouraging the WRs to cooperate among themselves horizontally.
 - I will let them work systematically together to develop and implement their plans in this regard.
 - Regional Office will fully support them in such development and implementation.
 - In this exercise, the WRs will only keep the Regional Office well informed regularly of their efforts.
 - I intend to meet all WRs twice a year in order to ensure effective interaction between COs and RO, listen to their progresses and achievements in countries.

16. • As I stated several times at several occasions that I will move steadily forward in implementing DG's policy of decentralization.
- In principle, WRs should take full responsibility for direct support to countries with backstoppings from the Regional Office.
 - Certainly, capability and capacity of WHO Country Offices need strengthening.
 - WRs will have to review their specific needs and requirements in this regard.
 - While saying this, I am fully aware of the suggestions and recommendations of WRs made to RD previously on this issue.
 - We will review all those suggestions and recommendations and take action as soon as possible on the ones which do not have budgetary or legal implication.
 - Recommendations with legal implication such as delegation of authority will need further study and careful consideration.
 - However, it can be ensured that WRs will have authority commensurate with their responsibility.
 - Such authority will be delegated only when adequate accountability is assured.
 - Accountability in this context also include the production of high quality outputs / results from work.
17. • Strengthening WHO Country Offices is a must, but we will be constrained by the limitation of resources, especially budget.
- However, we will try to do our best in this regard within the prevailing constraint.
18. • Colleagues, I also plan to decentralize certain regional and intercountry functions to countries.
- This needs a very careful study with the view to ensuring better cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
 - And most important, it will have to be ensured that such decentralization will not adversely affect staff, either regional or country.
 - We will work closely with HQ in this decentralization exercise.

19.
 - In this era of world competition, we have to build a strong alliance with other international agencies and organizations.
 - We will have to get involved closely in interagency coordination and cooperation that will significantly contribute to health development
 - We will always identify and utilize our comparative advantages in order to be technically competitive in the international affairs.
 - We should try to learn how to work with other agencies and organizations with only positive attitude, to be friend with everyone.
 - We will put more efforts to work with and support the work of SAARC, ASEAN and ESCAP when they are dealing with health.
 - Work in the area of collaboration with other international agencies and organizations which is also very important for us, is placed under the responsibility of DRD.

20.
 - With fast moving in technological advancement, especially in Information and Communication Technology, and with the increasing technical capability and capacity in counties, we have to change our style of working.
 - Our profile and role have to be changed in order to reorient ourselves to be able to live up to the expectation in the current global change.
 - In addition to our indispensable technical competence, we also need skills in planning, coordination, communication and management.
 - This is for us to be really effective in mobilization of resources, including technical resource, promoting and facilitating intercountry cooperation, promoting and supporting the development of the total human well-being, helping countries in using health to spearhead for peace.

21.
 - With today economic competition, the world needs citizens with adequate ethics.
 - We will have to help the world by promoting ethical practices in all our areas of work.
 - First of all, everyone of us has to be ethics-oriented and ethical, in order to play a role model in this regard effectively.

- 22.
- Friends, again back to ourselves in providing services to countries, while accepting that we have done our best in so doing, I would like to urge all of us to continue treating our national people with adequate respect, courtesy, cordiality and friendliness.
 - Please display our non-bureaucratic and positive approach fully at all times when dealing with people from anywhere.
 - I am not happy to see our nationals invited as advisers for involvement in the WHO's work, but treated as trainees.
 - If we do not have enough money to do anything properly, we should not do that thing at all.
 - Please always treat all people with adequate respect of their dignity.
- 23.
- As we all know our resources are finite and limited, we have to get the most out of their utilization.
 - While trying to economize the utilization of our resources, we should always keep in mind that economy should not be at the cost of efficiency. We must always be able to do with less, even do better with less.
 - Please always be cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness minded in doing our work.
 - We always have wastage in the utilization of our resources.
 - We have to try our best to reduce this wastage.
 - I am particularly interested in the four areas of our work in which we may be able to do something to better maximize benefits / gains.
 - STC/STP
 - APW/CSA/TSA
 - Meetings/GEAs
 - Travelling of staff
 - In dealing with these issues, I will proceed in two stages.
 - Immediate action will be taken to review the pending proposals by a small group involving concerned technical units to ensure their rationality.
 - I will also pursue a systematic study in order to see how we can deal with our activities in these areas in a more efficient and effective manner.
 - I decided to organize Internal Review and Technical Audit in RD's Office which will be responsible for this study.
 - This unit is to help Administration in its decision to ensure best practices in the management of our work.
 - We have moved towards results-based programme budgeting approach. We have to ensure that this approach is adequately applied in the process of our programme budget implementation.

- 24.
- Many things need to be said, but I think it is enough for the time being.
 - We will have time to talk about some other things, in addition to following up what we have said today.
 - The new organogramme of the Regional Office has already been distributed to all of us, I will not deal with it today.
 - Now, WRs will go to their retreat, and I will meet them again on 10 March, then I can have another session for discussion with them on various issues.
 - I wish their retreat all success, and look forward to their suggestions and recommendations.

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