

Address

by

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*at the
9th Meeting of Health Secretaries of
Countries of SEAR*

*on the
Future Work of WHO-SEAR with Member States*

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**Address by Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, Regional Director of WHO South-East Asia
Region at the Ninth meeting of Health Secretaries of Countries
in South-East Asia Region, 22-23 July 2004**

Future Work of WHO-SEAR with Member States

Chairman,
Excellencies,
Honorable health secretaries,
Distinguished participants,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

- The situation in the world has changed a lot today from 56 years ago, when World Health Organization started its work.
- It is essential for the Organization to effect internal change in order to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness; and to live up to the expectation of its member states and other partners.
- The need for this change has been well recognized; and efforts have been regularly made in the past, as a continuous process in the organizational management.
- I now have a privilege to be WHO Regional Director of South-East Asia.
- It is my duty to ensure relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization's services to countries in the Region.
- With this responsibility in mind, I have initiated certain reorientations in the functioning of WHO in South-East Asia.
- My lines of action in this regard are based on the recognition
 - ❖ that during this 56 year period, capability and capacity of countries' health sector have been remarkably increased, even though at varying degrees;
 - ❖ and that health development today is much more complex than that when WHO started its work; this is in terms of both content and process of the development.
- My direction and actions are certainly guided substantially by my previous experience for almost 17 years in various capacities in WHO SEARO.

Colleagues,

- The first thing I did when took over the office in March this year was to implement the overall WHO policy on decentralization.
- We have gone in a big way in strengthening WHO presence in countries.

- I decided to double the delegation of authority to WHO Country Representatives, in order to increase their role and responsibility in serving countries.
- At the same time, we have planned to strengthen WHO country offices to increase their capacity in management, planning and technical strengths.
- Through our development and learning programme, staff at both regional and country offices will receive additional training to ensure their efficient and effective support to countries.
- In the process, we will make sure that the national counterparts will also benefit from this training programme.
- Prerequisite for this movement is the Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS), which all countries in the Region have already developed.
- This country specific strategy is being used as a basis for strengthening WHO presence in the individual Member States.
- Another important decision made in this connection is to allow WHO Representatives to work horizontally among themselves without the requirement for prior permission from the Regional Office.
- However, they have to do this in a planned manner, carry out activities systematically with good monitoring of the processes and evaluation of the outcomes.
- This approach is intended to contribute to the promotion of intercountry cooperation.
- In pursuance of this horizontal cooperation among WHO Representatives, we have particularly emphasized to them that concurrence of the concerned national authorities must be secured before taking action.
- With the doubled delegation of authority, the WHO Representatives now have full responsibility for WHO direct support to countries.
- We will see to it that there should not be any imposition of activities on the countries from the Regional Office without request from the Governments through the WHO Representatives.
- But, certainly regional and intercountry activities hosted by countries will continue.
- The Regional office staff are now supposed to provide full technical backup to WHO Country Offices in the development and implementation of WHO country programme budgets and workplans.
- Attempt will also be made to ensure that regional and intercountry programmes are to directly support and supplement the activities of the country workplans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The Director-General has issued an organization-wide policy on country focus of WHO work.
- In this context, we in SEAR are intending to move one more step forward.
- That is the idea of identification and implementation of country specific approaches for each individual Member States.
- Efforts will be exerted to identify specific needs and requirements for health development in the individual countries; then, country specific programmes will be developed to respond to those needs and requirements.
- Certainly, the normative work of WHO will be enhanced, and be the primary responsibility of the Regional Office.
- Various guidelines, norms and standards, nomenclatures, generic training modules, for example, will be developed by the Regional Office staff in coordination with WHO Headquarters, using information from countries.
- These outputs from the normative function will be made available for application by countries.

Distinguished participants,

- In order to move WHO activities in the Region closer to countries as much as possible, we are contemplating to decentralize some regional and intercountry functions in areas, such as, surveillance, health systems development, trade and globalization, and chemical safety to certain countries.
- This is to ensure the effective use of country expertise in WHO work, and to further promote intercountry cooperation.
- Strengthening of WHO Collaborating Centers and National Centers of Expertise will be supported in a more concrete manner through this approach.
- Needless to say, we will double our efforts in strengthening and promoting intercountry cooperation in health in the Region.
- In this process, the emphasis will be placed on the cooperation for tackling priority health problems, especially at the border areas.
- Success in all these efforts will depend on the spirit of regional solidarity and unity, which will have to be considered within the broad context of social, cultural and political dimensions.
- And also, under the spirit of interregional collaboration between and among WHO regions, we will pursue our work diligently.
- After my nomination by the Regional Committee last year, I was invited to Manila by the Regional Director of the WHO Western Pacific to discuss interregional collaboration.

- We pledged together to go systematically in a planned manner in such a collaboration; and a number of specific areas was identified for the purpose.
- With these collaborative spirits, I am confident that our countries in the Region will have more opportunity to work together, or to work with country partners in other Regions; in pursuing their health development, with support, catalysis and facilitation from WHO.

Honorable health secretaries,

- We need a good built-in mechanism to ensure that our decentralization and delegation of responsibility and authority are working according to our wish.
- Good planning is the prerequisite in this regard.
- We will proceed carefully with a good plan which is to be implemented systematically under constant supervision.
- Good country workplans/operational plans are essential; all activities to be taken in this connection have to be included in such plans.
- Frequent dialogue between WHO Country Representatives and the Regional Director will be a mean for monitoring actions taken at the country level.
- We plan to hold formal meeting between the two levels, Regional Office and Country Offices every six months. This is to discuss, among other things, problems and constraints faced in our pursuance of such decentralization and delegation.
- In this exercise, we will also have to ensure oversight of the activities carried out at both country and regional offices.
- In this connection, an Internal Review and Technical Assessment unit is being established, to help ensure that we are doing the right things according to plans, and in compliance with the established policies and strategies, rules and regulations.
- Most importantly, this is to ensure that our management initiatives are really beneficial to the Member States.
- In this process of feedback mechanism, we will take immediate corrective action without delay, if this is indicated through the information from our monitoring and oversight.
- I believe, we all agree that this is time for change, and we have to make sure that we will only effect change for the better.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- On another aspect of our efforts, we have faced the issue of how to sustain gains from development.

- Whatever we have developed, especially at national scale, tends to be unsustainable in a long term.
- Sustainable national development in health needs strong public health infrastructure.
- With this in mind, we are planning to pursue, as our highest priority, the strengthening of public health infrastructure in countries of the Region.
- Many things need to be undertaken in this very important exercise.
- However, we will focus first on strengthening and building public health workforce, through the relevant educational programmes.
- A high level task force is being formed to brainstorm and develop a conceptual framework on public health education in the WHO South-East Asia Region in the 21st century.
- Regional socioeconomic, cultural and political specificity will be particularly taken into consideration in this development.
- This conceptual framework will be the basis for us to move forward in the development of public health education programmes in the Region.
- A lot of expertise already exists in the Region in this area.
- Therefore, a mechanism has been initiated to promote and facilitate intercountry cooperation; or inter-institutional cooperation.
- A regional network of public health education institutions has already been formed.
- WHO will make sure that the network can start function, and be effective links between or among institutions in the Region.
- At the same time, SEARO is fielding experts to certain countries to study the situation, and help plan for the development of their public health education programmes.

Honorable health secretaries,

- All these need financial resources.
- And we all know well that WHO resources are very limited.
- With this in mind, I have paid my special attention to resource coordination and mobilization.
- As a part of this exercise, we will also ensure the most efficient and effective use of available resources, through careful review and reorientation of current WHO workplans.
- If indicated, the budget will be shifted as appropriate, to where it is most needed for the development in priority areas.

- At the same time, we are exerting particular efforts in mobilizing extrabudgetary resources.
- Several proposals required for such mobilization have been developed, and dialogues with a wide range of potential donors has taken place.
- In this challenging task, we are yet to critically assess our efforts to see how much funds would be forthcoming.
- Moreover, on the issue of budget, we will try to ensure fair distribution to countries, through the objective assessment of technical needs of the individual countries.
- We are contemplating the establishment of an expert group to pursue such assessment and development of objective criteria for resource distribution to countries.

Distinguished participants,

- Now, we are also pursuing the streamlining of management processes in various areas of our operation at the Regional Office
- This is to ensure increased efficiency through the reduction of bureaucratic hurdles and bottlenecks; and promoting cordial services to countries and other partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Too many to do, and, may be, too much to do.
- However, we in WHO have a strong will and commitment to do all this.
- Success depends on the united efforts of my WHO colleagues, at both country and regional levels; and most importantly, on the support from the Member States in the Region, for which we plead.
- Honorable health secretaries, distinguished participants, through your wisdom, please provide us with advice and guidance that show a clearer way to which we can move forward with more confidence in this formidably challenging task.
- Mr Chairman, you may kindly allow my DPM to present briefly some more details of this subject.
- Thank you.