



REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Provisional Agenda item 11.1

Seventy-second Session
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9 July 2019

**Management and Governance matters:
Management performance and Transformation
in the South-East Asia Region**

This Agenda item provides updates on the progress made in advancing the Region's attainment of the priorities of the Transformation Agenda and the Regional Director's Flagships Programmes.

The strong leadership and commitment of the WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia, particularly expressed through the clear directives of the eight Regional Flagship Priority Areas, has allowed the Region to enhance its policies and technical support to Member States and strengthen focus on financing and staffing needs to match priorities and requirements. The Regional Director had charted the roadmap for her second term enunciating three focus areas for the Region:

- i. To sustain what has already been achieved in her first term since 2014;
- ii. To accelerate public health efforts in the Region to reach the goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030; and
- iii. To innovate and seek new science and technology in WHO's work in public health.

Accordingly, the SEA Region is very well positioned to contribute to the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and the Director-General's Transformation Agenda.

In addition, Decision WHA69(8) requests the 'Director-General and the Regional Directors to provide the biennial WHO country presence report for review by the Regional Committees, as an information document for the Health Assembly through the Executive Board and its Programme, Budget and Administration Committee'.

Document A72/Inf.4, "WHO reform process, including the Transformation Agenda, and implementation of United Nations Development System reform: WHO presence in countries, territories and areas" presented at the Seventy-second World Health Assembly is attached as an information document to this Working Paper for perusal by Member States. The document provides an overview both of WHO's current country presence and of the plans for an enhanced future presence for the Organization.

The attached Working Paper was presented to the High-Level Preparatory Meeting for its review and recommendations. The HLP Meeting reviewed the paper and made the following recommendations for consideration by the Seventy-second Session of the Regional Committee:

Action by WHO

- (1) Ensure continued focus on country priorities and sustainable growth in the achievement of the Regional Flagship Priority Areas in alignment with the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and the Transformation Agenda.

This Working Paper and the HLP Meeting recommendations are submitted to the Seventy-second Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia for its consideration.

Background

I. Global perspective

1. Since the introduction of reforms in 2011, considerable progress has been achieved towards making WHO a more effective, efficient, transparent and accountable organization striving towards improving health outcomes. The progress to date has validated the direction of overall organizational reform and highlighted the need for adjustments in additional areas.
2. With the Organizational shifts set out in the Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023 (GPW13) to achieve the “triple billion” goals, WHO has established a Transformation plan drawn from consultations between WHO headquarters, regional offices and country offices, to outline “how” the Organization will shift its operating model as well as its processes and ways of working together to realize these goals.
3. GPW13 proposes a strengthened focus on delivering results in countries, and WHO’s Transformation project is designed to reshape the Organization towards this direction.

II. Approach to Transformation

4. The Transformation is guided by lessons from WHO reforms over the past 15 years, advice from Governing Bodies and other stakeholders, inputs from staff across the Organization and a detailed staff survey. The resulting five major elements were set forth, capturing the holistic approach of the Transformation:
 - A new strategy to drive the work of all staff;
 - a redesign of our key processes;
 - a new, aligned operating model across all three levels of the Organization;
 - culture change to improve collaboration and bring out the best in our staff; and
 - a new approach to partnerships.
5. Major milestones related to Transformation in WHO are:
 - Adoption of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW13) by Member States at the Seventy-first World Health Assembly in May 2018.
 - “Radical redesign” of 13 “Core Processes” in December 2018 and agreement to harmonize them across WHO. The major process redesigns cover six technical functions (norms & standards, research, strategic policy dialogue, data, innovation, technical cooperation); three external relations functions (resource mobilization, external communications, internal communications) and four business functions (planning & budget, supply chain, recruitment, and performance management).
 - The first “Global Goals Week” held in February 2019 helped staff to directly link their work to the GPW13 outputs and outcomes, aligning each staff member’s success to the success of the Organization.
 - WHO has taken determined steps to move towards a more collaborative, performance-oriented and impact focused culture. This journey started with the WHO-wide “culture survey” completed by 5600 staff in 2017. Thereafter the “Values Jam” engaged, for the first time, staff across the entire WHO in a global conversation on the pulse of the organization, resulting in the launch of the “WHO Values Charter” in May 2019.

- On 6 March 2019, a new WHO-wide operating model with clear roles for each level of the Organization was announced. The structure places country offices in the lead role for engagement with governments to translate normative work into policy. The regional offices are to be responsible for providing technical support to the country offices and coordination of regional exchanges and public health commitments. WHO headquarters will focus on “global goods” (e.g. norms and standards, research) and specialized technical assistance.
- This new model introduces major changes resulting in a single, streamlined structure for the entire Organization, with four major pillars:
 - i. Two pillars, programmes and emergencies, focus on delivering the “triple billion” targets;
 - ii. Two pillars provide corporate external relations and business functions.

Updates from the SEA Region

6. Updates on Programmatic, Governance and managerial reform elements and the regional achievements have been presented at Regional Committee sessions regularly since the Regional Director, Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, took office in 2014.

7. The leadership and commitment of the Regional Director has enabled the Region to strengthen technical support to Member States and improve alignment of financing and staffing needs to match priorities and requirements. The directions taken since 2014 are in clear alignment with the Transformation Agenda launched by the Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

8. Notably, the priorities of this Region – the eight Flagship Priority Programmes – are in alignment with the GPW13 triple billion outcomes and will contribute greatly to their achievement.

9. The Regional Director charted the roadmap for her second term, enunciating the three focus areas for the SEA Region during the next five years:

- i. To sustain what has already been achieved in her first term since 2014;
- ii. To accelerate public health efforts in the Region to reach the goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030; and
- iii. To innovate and seek new science and technology in WHO’s work in public health.

10. As the Region continues to pursue the eight Flagship Priority Areas, the triple billion targets laid out in the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the drive towards each of these imperatives is best summarized by the simple though powerful maxim: “Sustain. Accelerate. Innovate”.

11. With a firm focus on these areas as well as strengthened transparency and accountability, the continued value for money approach and focused resources to priority areas, the SEA Region is prepared to move forward rapidly in meeting its stated goals and achieving the planned health targets.

A. Strengthening country support initiatives

12. Decision WHA69(8) requests the “Director-General and the Regional Directors to provide the biennial WHO country presence report for review by the Regional Committees, as an information document for the Health Assembly through the Executive Board and its Programme, Budget and Administration Committee”.

13. The document A72/Inf.4, “WHO reform process, including the Transformation Agenda, and implementation of United Nations Development System reform: WHO presence in countries, territories and areas” presented at the Seventy-second World Health Assembly is attached as an information document to this working paper for perusal of the Member States. The document provides an overview both of WHO’s current country presence and of the plans for an enhanced future presence for the Organization.

14. The Regional Office and the country offices in the South-East Asia Region are aligned to the Transformation initiatives towards strengthening the quality of WHO work at country level and providing required support to country offices. A WHO Sub-Office in Cox’s Bazaar, Bangladesh, was set up recently and supported by the Emergencies and Administration teams of the Regional Office. This is an example of ensuring that the appropriate capacities are available where required.

15. To strengthen monitoring of activities at the Country level, a retreat on the Regional Flagship Priority Areas was held on 10–11 June 2019 wherein the Regional Director, Heads of Country Offices and Technical Directors held in-depth discussions on the progress of the Flagships and key issues/gaps as well as their alignment with the GPW13 and SDG Targets. The discussions focused on targets, implementation frameworks and the possible incorporation of new and emerging priorities.

16. During the current biennium, 76% of the Region’s financial resources have been distributed to WHO Country Offices, in accordance with the core vision of the Regional Director to “Sustain, Accelerate, Innovate” on gains already made while driving impact at the country level.

17. The Delegation of Authority from the Regional Director to the WHO Representatives in the South-East Asia Region has been updated and clarified to further empower and support the WHO Representatives in their managerial, health diplomacy, communication and partnership roles. The country offices now have more independence to carry out their planned activities according to the priorities set by the Member States.

18. Country support plans (CSPs) have been developed for the 11 countries in the Region based on the GPW13 priorities and identified in consultation with Member States.

19. Consistent with the additional emphasis placed on countries in GPW13, 91% of the 2020–2021 Programme Budget increase for the Region (US\$ 99.7 million) is for countries. This has resulted in the proposed distribution of 72% of the Budget (US\$ 277.9 million) for countries and 28% (US\$ 110.6 million) for the regional level for 2020-2021.

20. The meeting of the MoH Planning focal points with the WHO focal points on 12–13 June 2019 in New Delhi provided an opportunity to discuss the GPW13 country priorities, strategies and opportunities to drive impact in countries, including country collaboration between country offices and the ministries of health. The meeting allowed in-depth group work to review each country support plan and the specific support that countries will require to achieve the outlined objectives.

B. Strengthened Governance initiatives

21. The updates from the various parameters of Governance reform have been continually deliberated upon and reported at the highest levels of the Governing Body meetings. Adopting best practices from other regions and leading on certain initiatives, the SEA Region has taken significant steps during the past two bienniums to streamline the working of its Regional Committee and other high-level meetings. Member States have appreciated the streamlining that has been done in the following areas:

- Improved Agenda management: To ensure focus on deliberations and outcomes, a cautious effort was led by the Regional Director towards reduction in the number of Agenda items, pre-session documents and resolutions at Governing Body meetings. In addition, Side-events introduced at the Regional Committee have driven strengthened collaboration between the partners, Member States as well as the non-State actors on various topics of public health importance.
- Regional One Voice: The Regional One Voice denotes regional solidarity and focused representation from the Member States of the South-East Asia Region at high-level meetings and global forums on issues of importance to the Region as a whole.
- Green initiatives and paperless meetings: The use of a mobile application has been highly successful at the SEA Regional Committee sessions over the past two years. Electronic dissemination of documents piloted at the Regional Committee sessions and HLP meetings since 2017 has now been extended to all meetings in the SEA Region.
- Virtual Special Session of the Regional Committee: Following decision SEA/RC71 (3), the first-ever Special Session of the Regional Committee for South-East Asia was held through videoconferencing on 28 March 2019. The Regional Director, with support from Member States, took a major leap in achieving “value for money” and meeting cost and time efficiencies by harnessing the potential of information technology to connect Member States for the half-day virtual session. This is the first time that a WHO Governing Body session has been held virtually anywhere in the Organization.

C. Regional commitment to strengthening Transparency and accountability

22. A key element of the Transformation Agenda is the redesign of core processes to ensure more efficient and supportive implementation of WHO activities. Aligning with the Regional Director’s vision to “Sustain, Accelerate, Innovate”, the existing business operation areas in the SEA Region are being carefully reviewed towards enhancing professionalism of services within shorter timelines. Key highlights from the work completed since the last report for the Seventy-first session of the Regional Committee are:

- Situational analysis of the SEA Region procurement and supply chain landscape carried out with clear short- and medium-term recommendations.
- Quarterly recruitment planning initiated to reduce the approval and planning process prior to advertisement of positions across the Region.
- The South-East Asia Region Informatics System Management Committee was established by the Regional Director in November 2018 to review, monitor and prioritize the alignment of IT projects with strategic goals of the Region.
- The SEAR Risk Management Committee was also introduced by the Regional Director in November 2018 to support her in managing the regional risk register and in promoting the culture of risk management across the Region.
- Direct financial cooperation assurance activities continue to be carried out for proper use of WHO resources and to ensure that intended results have been achieved. These activities rely greatly on strong collaboration with Member States and regular programme and implementation meetings between staff of country offices and the ministries of health have proven critical in providing appropriate oversight and guidance.
- Contributing to the Regional Director's unequivocal direction on focused service delivery, the Regional Office for South-East Asia conducted its first services survey to assess the performance of the Administrative and Financial teams in the Regional Office. The results from the survey of staff across the Region provide a good indication of areas requiring further improvement and informed work planning for the service department. The results set a benchmark for continued yearly surveys and provided a platform for highlighting the importance of a service-oriented culture for these teams.
- Information technology services at the Regional Office were reviewed by the WHO internal audit team in 2018. In 2019 the Regional Office contracted an external auditor to explore in detail the security of the IT systems, processes and infrastructure at the Regional Office. Both these audits provided constructive recommendations which are being implemented diligently.
- Motivated by the culture change initiatives launched under the Transformation initiatives, the Regional Office organized interactive presentations on "respectful workplace" and available means of reporting issues and informal resolution processes for all country offices and Regional Office departments.
- WHO offices in the Region continue to implement sustainability measures, including reducing space usage by moving to open-plan office layouts and through paperless office initiatives. These activities have provided the additional benefit of improved collaboration across teams and greater efficiency of communications and processes.

D. Assessment of key Administration and Finance performance indicators

23. Continued enhanced monitoring and sustained compliance led to significant improvements in key performance indicators under "enabling" functions. Consequently, the SEA Region continues to meet and exceed targets set for all compliance indicators.

- Overdue donor reports: Careful monitoring of overdue donor reports has facilitated timely submission of interim and final donors' reports, resulting in reduction of outstanding receivables.
- Direct financial cooperation (DFCs): As part of continued efforts to target timely reporting, and with the support and cooperation of the respective ministries of health, the Region reported "zero" overdue reports as on 14 May 2019. Timely submission of DFC reports has further strengthened and contributed to effective delivery of results through greater compliance, accountability and stewardship of resources.
- Imprest operations: Electronic monthly imprest returns have been developed and implemented, improving turnaround time and saving on pouch costs.
- Audit recommendations: Substantial improvements have been made on reducing the number of outstanding audit recommendations. There are no outstanding recommendations as of June 2019.
- Compared with 2017, the Internal Control Assessment exercise for 2018 for the Region reflects that procedures and controls are in place and better aligned with the strategic direction and priorities of the Region.

The way forward

24. The Regional Director's guidance to "Sustain, Accelerate, Innovate" serves as a clear directive for management activities in the WHO South-East Asia Region. With the demonstrated achievements made to date across all management areas and the strong and performing support functions, Member States can look forward to continued improved support to implementation of WHO's technical programmes.

25. The specific opportunities identified are being focused on. These are as follows:

- Setting clear indicators for the Regional Director's Flagships and related 2020–2021 technical and country planned programmes allows for greatly improved monitoring and reporting. This enhances accountability for results across the Region.
- Allowing for, through the move to the new Regional Office premises, review of office layout structures that best match the level of collaborative and teamwork culture that the Regional Office aspires to achieve.
- The end-to-end supply chain review provides an opportunity for the SEA Region to greatly improve support for implementation at the country level.
- Enhancing efforts at achieving value for money and strengthening country office capacities to provide better support for more efficient delivery of public health programmes.
- Making use of the opportunity for yearly monitoring of perceptions on the level of support being provided to implement public health activities in the Region that was provided by the introduction of the services survey to assess the performance of the Administrative and Financial teams in the Regional Office in 2018.

26. The Committee is invited to note the report.