Leadership, coordination and support

Introduction

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WHO collaborating centres, unparalleled partners

Delegates, participants and guests gathered at the sixty-ninth session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in Manila, Philippines in October 2018.
Introduction

The Office of the Regional Director, the Division of Programme Management and the Division of Administration and Finance work in close coordination to support WHO’s work in the Western Pacific Region, coordinating technical programmes, country support, partner and donor relations, administrative and financial support, and communications.

The work of these branches of management is guided by the Regional Director’s vision of ensuring countries are always the starting point for WHO’s work. This year, the management team has led efforts to strengthen strategic communications including through the establishment of a new website for WHO in the Western Pacific Region, has continued to promote a strong culture of accountability and transparency, and has helped shape the new Regional Director’s vision and priorities for the next five years.

Office of the Regional Director
The Office of the Regional Director (RDO) directly supports the work of the Regional Director as the leader of WHO’s work within the Western Pacific Region and as a member of WHO’s global senior management team. RDO also provides leadership and coordination of communications, external relations and partnerships, and information products and services, and supports the work of WHO governing bodies.

The Communications unit (COM) within RDO works closely with the Region’s 15 WHO country offices, technical divisions and WHO headquarters to provide timely, accurate, credible, understandable, relevant and actionable health information and advice to policy-makers, partners and the public. This year, as part of a continuing effort to strengthen WHO communications in the Region, RDO led the development of a new website for WHO in the Western Pacific Region, including dedicated sites for all of the Region’s 37 countries and areas.

Strong communications rely on high-quality publications, information products and translation services. The Information Products and Services team (IPS), which includes the Library, the Publications unit and the Translation team, assist WHO staff and Member States in creating, translating, disseminating and retrieving health-related information.

The External Relations (ERP) unit supports good relationships with the 55 donors that directly support WHO’s work in the Region. ERP also ensures transparency and accountability in the use of donor funds, through rigorous systems of grant management and sustained coordination with technical units and country offices to ensure timely and high-quality donor reports. As a result, the Western Pacific Region has the highest proportion of donor reports submitted on time of all major WHO offices.

Division of Programme Management
The Division of Programme Management (DPM) provides overall direction for and coordination of the management of regional technical cooperation with Member States, through programme development and operations, country support and editorial services.

DPM directs strategic and operational planning focusing on results, oversees resource allocation based on priorities identified by WHO governing bodies as well as country cooperation strategies, fosters cross-programmatic collaboration and partnerships including with the United Nations (UN), and is responsible for overall coordination of governing body meetings as well as supporting mandates approved in WHO governing bodies.

The Programme Development and Operations (PDO) unit coordinates implementation of the programme
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budget and strategic planning of the new programme budget across the Region. Over the past year, the unit supported the implementation of Programme Budget 2018–2019 with a 74.9% utilization rate against available resources as at 30 June 2019. The mechanism of follow-up at each budget centre is through a Programme Management Officer (PMO). The PMO Network meets regularly: monthly teleconferences and an annual face-to-face meeting to discuss concerns related to the programme budget within and across the Regional Office and country offices. They worked together in planning the Programme Budget 2020–2021, the first one under the Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023. This process ensured that the Region’s priorities for the next five years are reflected in the programme budget. PDO also supported the effective organization and management of 71 regional meetings held in 2018 involving Member State representatives, partners and more than 296 technical experts.

The Country Support Unit (CSU) works closely with WHO country offices to ensure that Member State priorities and needs are at the centre of all work. A key aspect of this is the responsibility to coordinate the development, monitoring and review of WHO country cooperation strategies. Cooperation strategies are jointly developed with Member States to guide WHO cooperation with countries in support of their national health policies, strategies and plans. They offer a medium-term strategic vision of five to six years. CSU also serves as a regional focal point for many initiatives: WHO global transformation; UN Reform; evaluation; and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Additionally, the unit provides regional support for administering WHO collaborating centres, works closely with the human resources team to support interns and volunteers, and manages/coordinates significant cross-
cutting/special projects, such as the establishment of geographically dispersed specialized offices.

The Editorial Services team (EDT) continuously upgrades the quality and accessibility of documents that support the technical work of WHO in the Region. In addition to editing official documents, mission and meeting reports, EDT provides strategic guidance and quality control for information products in the Region and globally through its participation in the Publishing Policy Coordination Group. The team manages the updated Electronic Mission Report system and coordinates all documentation for the Regional Committee from all divisions in the Region. These documents, which now allow users to access reference materials by simply clicking hyperlinks, form the basis for important WHO technical support in Member States.

**Division of Administration and Finance**

The Division of Administration and Finance (DAF) consists of three units – Budget and Finance, Human Resources Management, and Information Technologies & Administration. The division ensures accountability and transparency in the use of funds through diligent reporting and oversight. Effective procedures for recruiting and retaining skilled staff, as well as support for equipping and empowering staff, help WHO deliver meaningful results in the Western Pacific Region.

The Budget and Finance unit within the division provides guidance, policies and reporting procedures that strengthen internal financial control for compliance and quality assurance. Over the past year, Direct Financial Cooperation (DFC) activities were implemented and reported in a timely manner in Member States across the Region, with financial support by the Organization that would otherwise have come from local government coffers. These payments assist governments to strengthen health development capacity, simultaneously enhancing the impact of WHO technical cooperation. The Region
has maintained zero overdue DFCs since September 2015. To ensure value for money, a total of 143 DFC quality-assurance activities have been conducted by WHO country offices in the Region, which is the highest among all WHO regional offices.

The Human Resources Management unit is tasked with recruiting world-class experts and getting them on board in the shortest time possible. The unit also considers gender and geographical representation to ensure gender balance and diversity among staff in the Region.

In 2018, WHO introduced professional counselling services to its workforce across the Region, including staff members and non-staff contractors such as consultants, as well as qualified dependents of staff members. This complements the services provided by ombudspersons and the Health, Safety and Well-being Committee. These efforts epitomize the Organization’s commitment to the welfare of staff and a safe working environment. The Region maintained its record of 100% compliance for timely completion of staff performance appraisals, known as Performance Management and Development System.

The Information Technology group worked to manage risks and increase compliance over the past year. Main initiatives focused on increasing infrastructure safeguards and back-ups, enhancing network quality, and delivering administrative and technical solutions based on best practices to meet WHO programme objectives. Key achievements included: the launches of an online consultant management system and a fixed asset management system.

In the Administrative Services Unit, 2018 saw a comprehensive review of services provided by external partners, which led to cost savings and increased efficiencies. Further, the unit continued to ensure security and an optimal working environment by enhancing a number of areas on the grounds of the Regional Office.
Strategic, effective and well-coordinated communications are a crucial tool in WHO’s work to support countries to build a better, healthier future for people across the Western Pacific Region.

Former Regional Director Dr Shin Young-soo, identified strategic communications as a key priority for WHO’s work in the Region – a focus that is continuing under the new Regional Director Dr Takeshi Kasai.

From 2018 to 2019, a major focus of this work was the creation of a new web presence for WHO in the Western Pacific Region, including dedicated sites for each of the Region’s 37 countries and areas. As a result, countries are now much more prominently featured on the Region’s website. The Western Pacific is the first WHO region to achieve this milestone.

The process of reimagining WHO’s web presence began with a stakeholder survey that captured input from Member States, influential media in the Region, partners and staff. The survey suggested that WHO’s web presence needed a major overhaul: content was out of date; the information architecture of the site was no longer fit for purpose (key audiences reported being unable to find information); and the content management system for maintaining the site was in need of replacement.

A thorough audit of the old site was conducted to inform the development and architecture of the new website – which was launched during the October 2018 session of the Regional Committee.

In the few weeks following the launch, more than 1200 stakeholders were surveyed, yielding extremely positive feedback on the new website. Analytics from the first eight months of the new site operation show that more people are visiting the WHO Western Pacific Region website as well as country office sites in the Region. Viewers are also spending more time, suggesting that they are better able to find the information they need once there.

The Western Pacific is the first WHO region with dedicated websites for each of its 37 countries and areas, making it easier to find relevant, country-specific information.
Future brightens for WHO interns

Qin Xianjing hopes that her internship with WHO will help prepare her to play a role in solving health challenges in native Guangxi, a largely agricultural province located in western China.

“I want to get a better understanding (of health issues) to be able to help people,” says 27-year-old Qin, explaining her motivation to be an intern. She is in her first year of doctoral studies in social medicine and health management at Guangxi Medical University.

Qin is one of 184 interns from an array of countries who worked in WHO offices across the Western Pacific Region from 2017 to 2018. Interest has grown with higher numbers of applicants in recent years, as WHO has taken steps to make internships more attractive and accessible.

“Internships are one of the many ways we are preparing the Region for the health challenges of tomorrow,” explains WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Dr Takeshi Kasai. “Many of these bright minds will be tomorrow’s public health champions in Member States.”

To improve transparency, accessibility and equity in the internship programme, the World Health Assembly in May 2018 decided to increase financial assistance to interns “as soon as possible and no later than 2020”. The Assembly also stipulated that by 2022 most interns be from low- and middle-income countries.

Current interns, who must cover their own travel and living expenses, say the reforms will make the programme more effective by attracting even more talent.

In Qin’s case, the university helped her parents – a schoolteacher and an agricultural supplies dealer – cover travel and living expenses.

“More help will mean more people can have this opportunity,” she says. “I’m so proud and nervous to do well because I’m the first one from this part of China.”
To achieve health-related Sustainable Development Goal targets, Member States in the Western Pacific Region face complex public health challenges: escalating health-care costs and inequities; advancing climate change; rapidly ageing populations; growing noncommunicable disease burdens; and persistent infectious diseases.

Strong partnerships in the health sector and beyond are critical to WHO’s capacity to support Member States in addressing these challenges. Among WHO’s partners, WHO collaborating centres stand out for the depth and breadth of support they provide in supporting the Organization to carry out its mandate and programmes while strengthening institutional capacity in countries.

Under the leadership of former Regional Director Dr Shin Young-soo, the Regional Forum of WHO Collaborating Centres in the Western Pacific has been organized every two years since 2014. Since the first forum, there have been vast improvements in how collaborating centres work with WHO and each other. Now some countries – Australia, Japan and the Republic of Korea – have in-country networks of collaborating centres. Collaborating centres routinely provide invaluable support for WHO and Member States, from timely diagnostic and testing assistance for infectious pathogens and vaccines during outbreaks to training health workers to improve the quality and safety of health-care services.

The Forum provides a platform for these innovations to take shape, where participants share progress, discuss innovative collaboration and networking mechanisms and explore ways to maximize the contribution of collaborating centres to health outcomes at the country level. The Third Regional Forum for WHO Collaborating Centres, held in Viet Nam in November 2018, brought together 227 participants from 140 collaborating centres across nine countries. The Forum reaffirmed the critical role of collaborating centres while strengthening information-sharing among WHO and collaborating centres, increasing understanding of country contexts and needs in order to improve alignment of collaborating centre activities with country priorities and WHO efforts to maximize impact at the country level.

Collaboration to improve WHO support at the country level will be strengthened further under the leadership of Regional Director Dr Takeshi Kasai. In 2020, the fourth Forum will review the outcomes of the partnerships of WHO, collaborating centres and Member States and guide the way forward to maximize the role of this critical component of WHO support.

Collaborating centres are vital to WHO’s country-level support for Member States, as reaffirmed by all participants at the Third Regional Forum of WHO Collaborating Centres in the Western Pacific in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.