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**WHO RESPONSE TO GLOBAL CHANGE
(Report of the Sub-Committee of the Regional Committee
on Programmes and Technical Cooperation, Part III)**

Since 1993, the Sub-Committee of the Regional Committee on Programmes and Technical Cooperation has been mandated to examine certain issues related to the WHO Response to Global Change and report to the Regional Committee. The Sub-Committee in 1996 focused on: reviewing overall progress; the work of the Regional Committee; the role of the WHO country offices; and the issue of the review of the Constitution. The conclusions and recommendations of the Sub-Committee are presented to the Regional Committee for its consideration and endorsement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1992, the Executive Board established the Working Group on the WHO Response to Global Change. The group was appointed from among the Executive Board members and its first report was presented to the Forty-sixth World Health Assembly in May 1993. The Regional Committee at its forty-fourth session (September 1993), reviewed the Report of the Working Group and examined its regional implications. The Sub-Committee of the Regional Committee on Programmes and Technical Cooperation was then mandated to examine certain issues more thoroughly and report to the Regional Committee.

Work on this topic in the Region has been accommodated both by implementation of the approaches outlined in the document *New horizons in health* and by the regular attention paid to maximizing efficiency in the Regional Office. One significant aspect of change in the Region has been the need for substantial cooperation outside the traditional health sector to solve health-related problems. Many organizations are now incorporating health-related issues in their agendas and employing health staff to address those issues. WHO faces a challenge to provide effective leadership in this situation. The Organization must therefore work closely with others to resolve health problems across sectors, rather than restricting its work to the traditional health sector.

The Sub-Committee assessed the progress and regional implications of the ongoing reform process within the Organization, focusing on the following aspects of the WHO response to global change: review of overall progress; work of the Regional Committee; role of the WHO country offices; and a proposed review of the Constitution.

2. CONCLUSIONS

2.1 Review of overall progress

The Sub-Committee acknowledged the extensive effort put into responding to the recommendations of the Executive Board Working Group on the WHO Response to Global Change

at all levels in the Organization. It focused its attention on the topics of greatest relevance to the Region. The following were highlighted:

- *New horizons in health*: Work continues on implementing the approaches outlined in the document. Countries are building on these approaches to varying extents in their programme planning and activities. For example, the Pacific island countries have discussed *New horizons in health* concepts and interpreted their application to their own situation. The Yanuca Island Declaration on Health in the Pacific in the 21st Century provides a framework for implementation, and the concept of Healthy Islands will guide work within that framework. In other parts of the Region, the related concept of Healthy Cities is proving useful in implementing work on *New horizons in health* in urban settings. It is noted that there is a separate agenda item on *New horizons in health* at the forty-seventh session of the Regional Committee this year under which these issues may be more fully discussed, and experiences shared.
- Programme support costs: It is recognized that operational costs are increasing, and that this is a matter for concern. However, the Sub-Committee continues to believe that programme support costs should not be increased above the current level of 13%. While some organizations use higher percentages in certain expenditure categories, it must also be noted that some, including some United Nations specialized agencies, apply lower figures. The present efforts in the Region to make the most of limited resources are proving effective and need to be continued. It is equally important to collaborate and cooperate with other organizations, so as to use the resources available to greater advantage in areas of common interest.
- Staff: In selecting staff, the criteria of technical competence and suitability for international civil service should continue to be carefully applied. As budget constraints become more severe, the need for cooperative working relationships among individuals and organizations becomes more urgent. The need for effective leadership on health-related issues also becomes more urgent. As part of this consideration, short-term consultants need to be selected with great care. They should have practical experience in appropriate country settings and a working familiarity with the problems to be dealt with. WHO's relationship with governments as a partner in selecting consultants is important in

this regard. Relevant technical expertise is available within the Region for consultancies, including developing countries.

2.2 Work of the Regional Committee

The Sub-Committee commended the efforts made to streamline the work of the Regional Committee. These efforts need to continue. Encouraging Member States to become more focused in their interventions is of particular interest. The session of the Regional Committee is a useful forum for sharing national experience and promoting national policy initiatives. However, it is necessary to use the limited time efficiently. The most important issues must receive a proportionate share of the time available and informed participation by all Member States must be supported.

Interventions could be structured around specific topics or issues of common concern, providing an opportunity for sharing general country information (e.g., highlights of accomplishments over the past year) in a written form rather than as an *ad hoc* intervention. This might be accomplished by inviting countries to prepare a paper on a specific topic. These could be assembled in an information folder and shared with other Member States. Where there is a specific agenda item on an issue, representatives could be encouraged to reserve their comments for that item, rather than making an intervention on the subject during the review of the Regional Director's report.

With reference to the review of the value and effectiveness of the work of the Sub-Committee, the group unanimously agreed that there was a valuable role for the Sub-Committee to play, noting that the country visits in particular were a very effective way of gaining information that could never be provided through documentation alone. In planning the country visits, there was a need to take into account the needs of the least developed countries of the Region, in view of the positive gains experienced by both those travelling and the country visited. It was felt that the discussions of the subject matter of the country visits were worthwhile for all those who attended the meeting of the Sub-Committee, in terms of information learnt which could be applied to their own country situation. This was felt to be a good example of the benefits of exchange of information and experience within the Region. In more general terms, it was noted that the Sub-Committee performs a useful service for the Regional Committee by considering complex subjects and preparing succinct recommendations on them.

In addition, several points were raised to improve operational aspects of the country visits and of the work of the Sub-Committee in general, such as:

- provision of additional briefing materials before the country visits; such as statistical data on the countries to be visited;
- adequate background information, with updates on the nature, content and significance of Organizational reform processes such as the WHO Response to Global Changes were also necessary for members of the Sub-Committee not familiar with WHO;
- addition of one extra day to the schedule of the country visits; in order to allow scheduling of extra visits needed by the group, and preparation of the report on the work done; and
- appropriate available technology such as internet, E-mail, etc. could be used to communicate information to the Sub-Committee members.

2.3 Role of the WHO country offices

The roles of the WHO country office in general and of the Country Representative in particular are critical to WHO's effective cooperation with Member States. There is an increasing need for well-informed, professional leadership by the Country Representative, as more organizations and agencies incorporate health-related issues in their agendas and employ health staff to address these issues. Alternative mechanisms for WHO programme delivery also need to be explored, looking beyond the traditional health sector, to include broad-based health issues and how to resolve them across sectors.

To enhance the role of the WHO country offices and the Country Representative, the following are important:

- the recruitment of technically competent national programme staff who are suitable for work in an international organization setting, and have country experience appropriate to their task;
- a clear, concise, country-specific statement of the roles and responsibilities of the WHO country office and the Country Representative in relation to collaboration with government on health-related matters; and

- a periodic, extensive refresher course (e.g. of 6-12 months duration) for Country Representatives to help ensure that their technical, diplomatic and leadership skills are maintained at a high level and further developed.

2.4 Review of the Constitution

The following points were made in response to the proposed review of the Constitution which had been suggested and is now under consideration by a special group of the Executive Board. The matter is raised to the attention of the Regional Committee in order that the views of the Member States may be made known to that special group.

- While a review of the WHO Constitution may be appropriate, care must be taken not to confuse constitutional issues with procedural issues. Before changing the Constitution, maximum use can be made of the mechanisms presently available through the Rules of Procedure. Where this is insufficient, many issues can be relatively easily addressed through amendment of the Rules of Procedures of governing bodies. For example, the Rules of Procedure provide scope for streamlining the work of the World Health Assembly, through amendments to the dates and duration of the sessions.
- In the context of responding to global change, the mission and functions of WHO need to be reviewed and clarified. This would include specification of a set of indicators to measure accomplishment of the mission. The review being conducted under the Renewal of the Health-for-All Strategy is the best mechanism for accomplishing this. It is not evident that this would require any change in the Constitution.
- The Western Pacific Region is one of the most rapidly developing areas in the world and is responsible for the largest population of any of the WHO regions (28% of the world). Over the last 25 years, the Region has experienced the greatest increase in membership (125%), ranking second only to the European Region in terms of increase in number of member states. Among this membership are included seven countries categorized as Least Developed Countries having special needs. These factors, among others, continue to support the request for the Western Pacific Region to have additional representation on the Executive Board (by increasing the number of seats on the Board).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Review of overall progress

- (1) The Region should continue its unique response to global change through the work being done in connection with the policy document *New horizons in health* and the related implementation frameworks and concepts, particularly the Yanuca Island Declaration and Healthy Cities-Healthy Islands.
- (2) WHO should not increase its level of programme support costs at this time.
- (3) As technical competence and suitability for international civil service are equally important in the staff selection process, the Secretariat should continue to work closely with governments in decisions affecting staffing at country level. In recruiting short-term consultants, priority consideration should be given to using expertise available within the Region, including developing countries.

3.2 Work of the Regional Committee

- (1) The efforts that have been made to streamline the work of the Regional Committee are commendable, and should be continued as part of the ongoing process of improving efficiency and effectiveness.
- (2) The proposals for a new format of the Report of the Regional Director (see WPR/RC47/2) include the suggestion of a specific topic for review every year, to be included as a separate section of the report. Countries should be invited to prepare a paper on this topic, for compilation in an information supplement, and sharing among the Representatives.
- (3) During the review of the Regional Director's report, representatives should avoid making interventions on issues for which there is a subsequent specific agenda item. Such interventions should be reserved for the specific agenda item.
- (4) The Sub-Committee should continue to play a relevant role in the functioning of the Regional Committee, through the existing terms of reference.

- (5) In relation to the country visits of the Sub-Committee, the Secretariat should review the arrangements made to ensure that they are as efficient and effective as possible.

3.3 Role of the WHO country office

- (1) To enhance the role of the WHO country offices, the Secretariat should:
 - promote the recruitment of technically competent national programme staff who are suitable for work in an international organization setting; and
 - develop, for each country, a clear, concise, country-specific statement of the roles and responsibilities of the WHO country office and the country representative in relation to the collaboration with government on health-related matters; and disseminate this information to all relevant counterparts and agencies.
- (2) Specific provision should be made for a periodic, extended (e.g. of 6-12 months duration) refresher course for country representatives to help ensure development and maintenance of their technical, managerial and diplomatic skills.

3.4 Review of the Constitution

- (1) Maximum use should be made of the Rules of Procedures of governing bodies before considering changing the Constitution.
- (2) The mission and functions of WHO should be reviewed and clarified as part of the overall process of Renewing the Health-for-All Strategy. This should include specification of a set of indicators to measure accomplishment of the mission.
- (3) Because of the large population it serves, its rapid growth rate, and the magnitude of the health problems it faces, the Western Pacific Region should have additional representation on the WHO Executive Board. This should be achieved by increasing the number of seats on the Board.