Regional Committee

Provisional Agenda item 11.1

Seventy-fourth Session

(Virtual) Nepal

6–10 September 2021

SEA/RC74/15

28 July 2021

Management and Governance matters:

Transformation in the WHO South-East Asia Region

This Agenda item provides updates on the progress made in advancing the South-East Asia Region’s attainment of the priorities of the Transformation Agenda in complete alignment with the Regional Director’s Flagship Priority Programmes.

The strong leadership and commitment of the WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia, enunciated in particular through the clear directives of the eight Regional Flagship Priority Areas, has allowed the Region to enhance its policies and extend more effective technical support to Member States to strengthen focus on financing and staffing needs that match priorities and requirements. The Regional Flagship Priority Programmes are in sync with the health-related Sustainable Development Goals, and WHO’s ‘Triple Billion’ global targets of a billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage, a billion more enjoying better health and well-being, and a billion more better protected from health emergencies.

Accordingly, the SEA Region is very well positioned to contribute to the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and the Director-General’s Transformation Agenda. Providing tailored support to Member States has always been the focus of WHO’s work in the Region, be it through prioritizing Member State views on the Flagship Priority Programmes or being perhaps the only region that provides maximum resources at the country level.

The report on the state of Transformation in WHO 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-fourth Session of the Regional Committee.

Action by WHO

(1) Ensure continued focus on country priorities and results in the achievement of the Regional Flagship Priority Programmes 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-fourth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia for its consideration and decision.
Introduction

1. WHO Transformation was launched in July 2017 with the establishment of the Working Group on Change Initiatives and was broadly communicated with the release of the WHO Transformation Plan & Architecture in February 2018.

2. It was conceived as an organizational change initiative aimed at better equipping WHO to achieve the ambitious goals set forth in its Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 (GPW13), that is, greater impact at country level in pursuit of the Triple Billion goals and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by optimizing its use of resources, streamlining processes and ensuring that WHO is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world.

3. Within this context, the ultimate aim of WHO Transformation has been to “make WHO a modern, seamless, impact-focused Organization to better help Member States achieve the health-related Sustainable Development Goals in the context of United Nations Reform”.

4. Six major shifts needed for WHO’s overall operating model have resulted in several major Transformation initiatives: putting countries’ needs at the core of all WHO work, differentiating the roles and responsibilities of each level of WHO; developing new mechanisms for managing WHO’s work towards the integrated strategic priorities and outcomes of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work; establishing truly global programmes, with collective ownership and shared three-level accountability for impact at country level; and improving capabilities and capacities across WHO, especially at the country level.

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity to rapidly implement and test key elements of WHO’s Transformation, including working in more agile, collaborative and innovative ways across the three levels of the Organization in both emergency and non-emergency WHO programmes, in order to support countries in responding to this unprecedented health crisis.

Transformation updates from the SEA Region

6. The SEA Region is very well positioned to contribute to the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and the Director-General’s Transformation Agenda. Providing tailored support to Member States has always been the focus of WHO’s work in the Region, be it through prioritizing Member State views in the Flagship Priority Programmes or being perhaps the only region that provides maximum allocation of resources at the country level.

7. In line with Regional Director’s strategic vision, country focus commitment and building on the efforts on strategic allocation of resources prioritizing countries, the allocation of overall Regional resources to the country level has increased steadily from 74% in the 2014–2015 biennium to more than 80% in the current biennium. In particular, for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, over 90% of the resources have been allocated to the WHO country offices in the Region.
8. 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 enabled 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.

9. The Regional Flagship Priority programmes are in sync with the health-related Sustainable Development Goals, and WHO’s global “Triple Billion” targets of a billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage, a billion more enjoying better health and well-being, and a billion more better protected from health emergencies.

A. Updates from the Region under each Transformation stream

i. Impact-focused, data-driven strategy

- Eight SEA Regional Flagships drive the priority and country focused agenda in the Region. Revision of the Regional Flagships has been achieved with defined targets for 2023 with a vision to “sustain achievements, accelerate progress and harness the power of innovation”, considering the new context of and commitments in GPW13.

- The new Country Cooperation Strategies (CCSes) that are being formulated are aligned with GPW13 and the new Country cooperation strategy Guide 2020: implementing the GPW13 for driving impact in every country.

- Until April 2021 eight CCSes were in an advanced stage of development while being aligned to GPW13.

- All country offices started the bottom-up planning with detailed prioritization of Outcomes and Outputs followed up by regional consultations that included planning officers from Member States, technical departments of the Regional Office and WHO country offices.

- Following the finalization of the GPW13 Output and Outcomes, all staff of the Regional Office participated in the “Goals Week” wherein they linked their work to GPW13 results. All staff at the regional and country level also committed to the WHO Values Charter and the “Common Values” of the Organization.

- The Regional Office assisted in refining the draft GPW Framework through consultations with Member States and by piloting the “impact framework” with countries and the new Output Score Card approach with technical units at the Regional Office for all three Strategic Priorities and the enabling pillar of GPW13.

- Building upon this work, the SEA Region established a Regional Results Measurement Framework, complete with a compendium of indicators with regional and country baselines and targets.

- The first ever Regional Results Report was also published in September 2020, providing information on the programmatic and financial implementation of the Programme Budget 2018–2019 in the South-East Asia Region based on the end-of-biennium assessment.
More recently, the mid-term technical monitoring exercise for the Region has been concluded with the Output Score Card modality. All 11 WHO country offices and regional budget centres fully participated and assessed planned outputs using the new Output Score Card methodology during the Programme Budget 2020–2021 Mid-Term Review.

To support the delivery for impact of the Transformation Agenda, a “Knowledge Hub” was launched globally on 21 October, with teams from the 8 pilot countries participating. Sri Lanka participated from the SEA Region and produced a delivery chain for opportunistic hypertension screening.

### ii. Establishing ‘best-in-class’ technical, external relations and business processes

#### Business processes

- Progress has been made to harness the benefits of information technology whereby the Region introduced the “SEAR Service Platform” which had the inherent enhanced efficiency of reducing the use of paper as well as better compliance and audit trail with the online introduction of various processes such as e-memos, exceptional approvals, award distribution requests and Contract Review Committee forms.

- Within the Region all Programme Development Management System (PMDS) appraisals were initiated on time with staff participation in the Goals Week wherein staff linked their work to the Programme Budget 2020–2021 outputs.

#### Technical processes

- The country profiles of two country offices, Nepal and Timor-Leste, were updated as per the new templates in 2020 in coordination with the Department of Country Strategy and Support (CSS) at WHO headquarters.

- The Country Support Plans (CSPs) for Programme Budget 2020–2021 were prepared based on the country priorities and in coordination with the Regional Office as well as the relevant departments at headquarters, thus contributing to three-level collaboration and engagement.

#### External relations

- The SEARO Partnerships and Resource Mobilization (PRM) unit has the capacity to effectively backstop WHO country offices for strategic resource mobilization. PRM is also supporting the drafting of multicountry and cross-regional proposals, increasing the coherence and intercountry coordination of the response to the pandemic.

- Innovative approaches continue to be adopted to strengthen public awareness, information and advocacy about the Regional Flagship Priority Programmes and the Triple Billion goals, and currently in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

- New media channels and opportunities are being leveraged to enhance public engagement for pandemic response. Three country offices – Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal – supported the launch of corporate social media channels in their countries.
• Partnership with Facebook at the regional and global level is helping engage and reach out to people with key information on COVID-19 and the Regional Flagship Priorities.

• The Regional Office’s media team coordinates with communications teams to align messaging on the pandemic and other key issues. Media outputs and social media messaging have been strategically developed to respond to critical issues raised in the public domain and have amplified the work and efforts being made by the Member countries.

• The publications and documentation team has also produced an enhanced volume of guidelines, publications and other information products on COVID-19 which have been used and disseminated by the country offices and stakeholders as part of the efforts to raise awareness and fight the “infodemic”.

• Communications products and printed material such as fliers and brochures have been developed on thematic calendar health days and for special health events to highlight and emphasize regional priorities and progress around them.

• Online trainings have been conducted to strengthen communication capacities of both governments and media partners to better and more efficiently communicate informed and evidence-based health messaging.

iii. A new, aligned, 3-level operating model

• The updated SEA Region organogram (2019) fits well with the GPW13 pillars and facilitates coordination and collaboration with headquarters’ updated structure.

• As part of the operation planning of the Programme Budget 2020–2021, a comprehensive HR planning process was undertaken to enhance country capacity to better respond to needs of Member States and implement GPW13.

• Building on the experience from the programme and administrative reviews conducted in all country offices since 2016 and for accommodating the learnings from Transformation Agenda, the country focus perspective of the GPW13 as well as the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic response, the SEA Region is updating the country review tool for further refinement and enhancement. Desk review and virtual consultations were conducted for the Nepal Country Office as an initiation into country office review.

iv. A new approach to partnerships

• In the context of the pandemic, the WHO leadership in the SEA Region has maintained regular contact with Member States to advocate for the implementation of technical guidance, public health measures and pandemic protocols and mechanisms, and support Member States to plan the response, identify gaps and needs and, to the extent possible, offer the technical assistance, equipment, supplies, training and other important contributions that are required by Member States.
While strengthening the partnership with international financial Institutions, SEARO has in particular led discussions with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Manila, to establish a mechanism for direct collaboration between the Bank and WHO at the regional and country levels.

Recent efforts to strengthen regional and country partnerships with the European Union have materialized into concrete interventions to respond to COVID-19 at the country and regional level through the development and humanitarian plans.

A series of regional partnership forums and meetings have been organized to strengthen the collective regional commitment and alignment of the work of State and non-State Actors with that of WHO in controlling COVID-19 transmission. These meetings also explored ways to ensure coordination among partners and increase collaboration to support Member States in maintaining essential health services as part of their pandemic response.

The Regional Office has also increased efforts to actively participate in the collective efforts of the UN system in the SEA Region, through more active participation in the Development Corporate Office-led processes and meetings, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-led humanitarian coordination mechanisms, and Economic and Social Commission for the Asia-Pacific (ESCAP)-led conferences and initiatives, to provide health technical advice and lend expertise to the UN deliberations and processes.

In addition, the South-East Asia Regional Health Partners’ Meeting on COVID-19 was organized on 3 June 2021. In this spirit of partnership, the Health Partners’ Meeting deliberated on strengthening the collective commitment and alignment of partners to work with WHO in controlling the pandemic and ensuring equitable distribution and availability of equipment, supplies and vaccines especially for priority populations, implementing the IHR (2005) regulations and maintaining essential health services.

v. New results-focused, collaborative and agile culture

SEARO has also identified representation for Output Delivery Teams (ODTs) and Technical Expert Networks (TEN) with regional and country staff representation. The ODTs have been instrumental and actively engaged in the global discussion process during the Output Score Card exercise and contributed to scoping outputs as part of the process for the development of Programme Budget 2022-2023.

The SEA Region also has a well-established, strong collaboration between the country offices and regional teams. Examples of such networks that aid enabling functioning are the Regional Programme Planning and Monitoring Network (PPMN) and the Administrative Officers’ Network.

The countries and the Regional Office conducted an initial review of workplans to identify their necessary reprogramming and repurposing, considering the priorities and needs in the light of the evolving situation. The exercise assessed the impact and identified mitigation actions, including new ways of working, to ensure that commitments are honoured considering the new reality.
• With the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent new ways of working the administrative processes have been further adapted to better facilitate the “new normal” at work.

• Several initiatives have been taken up in the Regional Office and country offices to ensure a safer working environment for staff. In 2019, a high level of compliance was achieved by staff on pursuing mandatory trainings on gender-based violence and cybersecurity.

• A South-East Asia Region web portal on mental health has been redeveloped to make available mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) tools in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The portal provides options for self-help in promoting mental well-being and opportunities to engage with mental health experts if needed.

• Since March-April 2020, the Regional and country offices also introduced special teleworking arrangements for technical and enabling business to continue despite the recurrent lockdown and movement restrictions.

• Regional Office and Country Offices have been continuously focusing on innovative mechanisms to implement the planned activities and commitments. These include more agile ways of working using virtual platforms for advisory group meetings, regional trainings and technical meetings. Webinars, assessments, documentation of lessons learnt, research coupling national with international expertise are some of the other examples.

• In addition, the Regional Medical Services team, in consultation with the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Committee, has provided regular consultancy and support to staff and their dependents during the unprecedented pandemic situation.

10. WHO’s new policy on preventing and addressing discrimination, abuse of authority, and harassment, including sexual harassment – “Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct (PAAC)” – came into force on 1 March 2021. The Regional Director introduced the policy to staff and emphasized that members of the WHO workforce are required to conduct themselves in a professional manner that demonstrates courtesy, common decency and cultural sensitivity, and to treat with dignity and respect all persons with whom they come in contact as part of their work with WHO. She reiterated her commitment towards zero tolerance towards acts of discrimination, abuse of authority, and harassment, including sexual harassment. At the same time, she underscored the importance of all staff strictly adhering to the WHO Model Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics in the discharge of their official roles and functions as well as in their personal conduct.

B. Assessment of key administration and financial indicators

11. The South-East Asia Region continues to enforce a culture of zero tolerance for non-compliance and strengthening internal controls and accountability across the Region. Continued enhanced monitoring and sustained compliance led to significant augmentation in the key performance indicators under the “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 16 June 2021. 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 diplomatic pouches/courier costs.

• Audit recommendations: Substantial improvements have been made on reducing the number of outstanding audit recommendations. The last Regional Office internal audit (September 2019) report concluded that the controls implemented to mitigate the key risks related to compliance, reliability and integrity of financial information, safeguarding of assets and efficiency and economy of the use of resources, were satisfactory and operating effectively.

• Compared with previous years, the Internal Control Assessment exercise for 2020 for the Region reflects additional procedures and controls that are in place to enhance alignment of various internal controls such as compliance and planning with the strategic directions and priorities of the Region, with due assessment of the risks posed by COVID-19.

C. Regional commitment to strengthening Transparency and Accountability

• In line with the Accountability and risk management functions, the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee (IEOAC) has urged that all principal risks are updated in the risk register and that the Risk Committee meets on a regular basis to update and review WHO’s risk management efforts. In this context, it is noted that the SEA Region Risk Management Committee supports the Regional Director in the decision-making process on operational matters related to compliance, risk management and ethics. It also oversees management and mitigation of strategic, operational, financial, reputational and other risks faced by the Region.

• As a part of the continued compliance process, desk reviews of assurance activities, including imprest reviews and Direct Financial Cooperation (DFCs) and Direct Implementation (DIs), have been planned and implemented at the country offices in the SEA Region. Country offices have been instructed and encouraged to carry out assurance activities or desk reviews to the extent feasible and upload these to the SharePoint site.

• The South-East Asia Region Informatics System Management Committee established by the Regional Director in 2018 continues to review, monitor and prioritize the alignment of IT projects with the strategic goals of the Region.
The way forward

12. The Regional Director’s guidance to “Sustain, Accelerate, Innovate” serves as a clear directive for management activities in the WHO South-East Asia Region.

13. With demonstrated achievements made to date across all management areas and the strong and well-performing support functions, Member States can look forward to continued and strengthened support for the implementation of WHO’s technical programme and focused Transformation initiatives at the country level.

14. The Committee is invited to note the Report.