

Collaboration within the United Nations system and with other intergovernmental organizations

Report by the Secretariat

1. The report on collaboration within the United Nations system and with other intergovernmental organizations is a means of regularly informing the Health Assembly about selective activities undertaken by the Secretariat to ensure that health is recognized as a key driver of sustainable development. WHO's collaboration within the United Nations system is an intrinsic part of its coordinating role in international health work, contributes to better aligned global governance for health, and provides an avenue to ensure coherent implementation of WHO's norms and standards. Additionally, WHO can advocate funding for health and is able to access additional financial resources available through different United Nations mechanisms, mainly at global and country levels.

2. WHO's collaboration with the intergovernmental organizations, including those in the United Nations system, spans all levels of the Organization and all its technical areas. This work is regularly described in both separate technical reports and the documentation for the regional committees. This report focuses on actions of Organization-wide relevance and those specifically concerning activities at the country level in support of Member States' efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals.

RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR A MORE STRATEGIC APPROACH ACROSS THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

3. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, the focus of the United Nations system-wide activities in the area of development has been on ensuring immediate actions for realization of its goals. These activities included strengthening the internal capacity of the system to support Member States in making timely and sustained efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Attaining the goals of the 2030 Agenda demands greater emphasis on programmatic cooperation across entities than has been the case in the past. An important mechanism to improve system-wide coherence, coordination, transparency and effectiveness of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system, especially at country level, is the regular quadrennial comprehensive policy review undertaken by the General Assembly.

5. In December 2016, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/243 on the Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system which establishes key system-wide strategic policy orientations and operational modalities for the United Nations' engagement at country level for the period 2017–2020. The resolution builds upon discussions during the 18-month-long intergovernmental dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system, organized under the Economic and Social Council.

6. Although the provisions of the resolution are not binding for WHO, they have important implications for WHO's work. First, as the specialized agency of the United Nations system for international health, WHO is committed to increasing coherence among all United Nations entities with a mandate relevant to health, especially funds and programmes whose operational model will have to adjust to the provisions of the resolution. Secondly, the resolution represents a consensus among Member States with strong support from, both donors and countries with United Nations programmes. Thirdly, WHO actively contributed to the preparatory process leading up to the adoption of the resolution in several ways, including: providing data; participating in surveys and giving voice to the main benefits and challenges of the United Nations work at country level; contributing to the Secretary-General's reports on the implementation of the previous resolution on the Quadrennial comprehensive policy review (resolution 67/226 of 21 December 2012); and sharing experience on the elements of the WHO reform of importance to the whole United Nations system. The resolution invites all specialized agencies to report on specific actions undertaken in response to recommendations in agency capacity, in addition to contributing to system-wide level monitoring of progress.

7. WHO is well advanced in acting on the recommendations of the resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of relevance to specialized agencies. For example, the Proposed programme budget 2018–2019 contains an improved results-based framework that identifies clear links with the specific targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Health Assembly approves the full budget of the Organization, including both assessed and voluntary contributions, and the web portal provides timely and comprehensive data on funding flows.¹ WHO regularly organizes financing dialogues to ensure alignment and predictability of funding with the agreed priorities of the Organization and to provide a platform for donors to examine any issue of importance to the funding of the Organization. WHO is already implementing differentiated modalities of country presence aligned with national needs and WHO capacity. The various ways in which WHO has a "presence" in countries include country offices, subnational offices, multicountry offices, offices in territories, country desk officers in regional offices, direct communications from a regional office, as well as provision of support from headquarters and six regional offices to all countries. WHO is the third largest contributor to the cost-sharing of the funding for the resident coordinator system at global, regional and country levels.

8. It is important to note that the General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to prepare, for further review by the United Nations governing bodies, several proposals that have the potential to initiate additional transformations of the functioning of the system. These include:

- (a) a system-wide outline of present functions and capacities of individual agencies in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with recommendations for addressing gaps and overlaps, which would then inform the design of concrete actions, as well as options for aligning funding modalities with the functions, to be reflected in new strategic plans;
- (b) options and implications for improving accountability and overall coordination of the United Nations' entities and their oversight by member States; and
- (c) a comprehensive proposal on further improvements to the resident coordinator system.

¹ <http://extranet.who.int/programmebudget/> (accessed 12 April 2017).

9. The General Assembly has established a High-level Political Forum as the main platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda with the objective inter alia to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, facilitate exchange of experiences and best practices, and promote system-wide coherence and coordination. It provides a platform to review country-specific progress and progress in different thematic areas. In 2016, 22 countries presented voluntary national reviews highlighting their experience in the first year of commencing work towards attaining the Goals of the 2030 Agenda. In 2017, more than 40 countries will follow suit. The Secretariat has established a clear mechanism and issued guidance to WHO country offices for providing support to countries in conducting the reviews. In addition, WHO will co-lead thematic review of the progress and challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and contribute to the thematic reviews of other goals planned for 2017, thereby firmly establishing linkages across all the Goals.

10. A more strategic approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda is evident in interagency collaboration. WHO actively engaged in the drafting of policy documents aimed at ensuring better coordination among organizations of the United Nations system, especially through the Director-General's role as the Chair of the High Level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. In 2016 the Chief Executives Board endorsed inter alia the common principles to guide the United Nations system's support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Shared United Nations Framework for Action for equality and non-discrimination at the heart of sustainable development, both of which provide strong impetus for furthering coherence and alignment across main principles of the 2030 Agenda.¹

MOBILIZING THE SUPPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL IN PROMOTING INTERSECTORAL RESPONSES TO HEALTH IN THE ERA OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

11. In 2016, numerous health issues received high-level attention in the governing bodies of the organizations in the United Nations system. In addition, global conferences on issues of great importance for the international political and development agenda had a strong health component, with notable engagement of WHO. This continuing trend of high-impact and emerging health issues being addressed in inherently political forums strengthens collaboration among the various governing bodies, thus complementing ongoing collaboration among the secretariats and political commitment in ensuring comprehensive and coherent response to health challenges across different sectors. Such practice clearly strengthens the distinct roles of and value added by both the United Nations and WHO and contributes to a more integrated response to health challenges across the world.

¹ Available at, respectively: http://www.unsystem.org/CEBPublicFiles/CEB_2016_6%20_Add.1%20%28inequalities%20framework%29.pdf and respectively <https://www.unsceb.org/CEBPublicFiles/Common%20Principles%202030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development-27%20April%202016.pdf> (both accessed 18 April 2017).

12. In the first half of 2016, the High-level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises, chaired by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, submitted its report “Protecting humanity from future health crises”.¹ WHO supported the Secretary-General in preparing suggestions on ways to implement the recommendations of the Panel.² The Panel clearly reaffirmed WHO as a single global health leader and its recommendations directly informed the operationalization of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme.

13. The Presidents of France and South Africa, the Directors-General of WHO and ILO, and the Secretary-General of OECD co-chaired the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth. WHO provided inputs for the work of other panels established by the Secretary-General, notably the High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines and the High-level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment.

14. At its high-level meeting on antimicrobial resistance (New York, 21 September 2016), the General Assembly in resolution 71/3 adopted a political declaration which recognized the grave challenge that antimicrobial resistance presents to many achievements of the twentieth century beyond the health sector. Heads of State and Governments committed to pursue multisectoral action to address those challenges and requested inter alia the establishment of an ad hoc inter-agency coordination group to “provide practical guidance for approaches needed to ensure sustained effective action to address antimicrobial resistance”. WHO will provide the secretariat for the work of the group and co-chair it with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

15. WHO worked within the United Nations system to advocate, raise awareness, support high-level political commitment of Member States, and ensure good recognition of health aspects of the world drug problem, migration, and housing and sustainable urban development. The adopted outcome documents of conferences on those issues – “Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem” (resolution S-30/1), “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants” (resolution 71/1), and “New Urban Agenda” (resolution 71/256) – recognize the profound impact of these global trends on the health of populations and the need to support health systems in order to address those specific health needs.

PROMOTING COHERENCE AND EFFICIENCY IN DELIVERING RESULTS AT COUNTRY LEVEL

16. The report of the United Nations Development Group “Together possible: Gearing up for the 2030 Agenda”,³ which presents the results of the Group’s coordination in 2015, shows that, already in the first year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 95 United Nations country teams received requests from host countries to support national-level implementation activities, including general orientation, mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals in national development plans, measurement, and reporting, as well as for specific Goals. Interagency groups are increasingly responding to challenges, requesting action for more than one Goal and promoting integrated approach to address the indivisibility and universality of the 2030 Agenda.

¹ Document A/70/723.

² See document A/70/824.

³ For an executive summary, see <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/2016doc/executive-summary-undg-2015-results-report.pdf> (accessed on 13 April 2017).

17. Mapping of agencies that chair or co-chair interagency groups across the Goals shows that WHO leads the United Nations work across different countries in all Goals except the Goal 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation). WHO is most actively engaged in groups dealing with different health issues, such as nutrition, water and sanitation, and high-quality and equitable basic services. Strengthening national capacity is supported by the Secretariat's provision of technical support, policy advice, training, financing, support planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting. However, the Secretariat also supports work in areas such as youth, gender, human rights and equity, environment, governance, poverty reduction, South–South cooperation, livelihoods, social protection, climate change and disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, 19 WHO country offices have provided technical support for the development or revision of national health and/or development plans to incorporate the Goals and their targets.

18. More than 100 out of 365 joint programmes globally were developed to address health issues under the Goal 3. Joint programmes promote interagency collaboration, address broad determinants of health, bring expertise into teams at country level, and reduce competition for funding.

19. The Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia, recognizing the relevance of health for development, established a regional issue-based coalition on health led by WHO Regional Office for Europe. Clear terms of reference have been developed and adopted, and priorities for cooperation have been identified in order to strengthen support from organizations in the United Nations to Member States in the implementation of health-related targets.

20. These facts show the importance of WHO's engagement in the development of policies and guidance on the work of, and strengthening the capacity of, WHO staff members at country level in actively participating in United Nations country teams. Some of the relevant work within the United Nations Development Group includes the development of the new expanded support guidance package on United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks,¹ operationalization of its strategy on mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support by issuing *Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Reference guide to United Nations Country Teams*, as well as a user manual for its business operations strategy.

21. The country cooperation strategy, WHO's medium-term vision to guide its work in a country, will be used as a tool to strengthen the linkages between the work of WHO at country level and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. WHO has issued clear guidance² on the relevance of a country cooperation strategy to WHO's commitment to contributing actively to the achievement of the Goals of the 2030 Agenda by strengthening national leadership and ownership through prioritizing a country-led approach.

22. By promoting an integrated and multisectoral approach country cooperation strategies have greater utility as a tool for ensuring coherence within the overall activities of the United Nations system at country level. The country cooperation strategies and the health dimension of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework need to be harmonized and mutually reinforcing.

¹ The term "United Nations Development Assistance Framework" should be regarded as a generic term for a strategic programme framework that describes the collective response of the United Nations system to national development priorities. It may have a different name in a specific country.

² WHO. WHO Country Cooperation Strategy: Guide 2016. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016 (<http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/251734/1/WHO-CCU-16.04-eng.pdf>, accessed 13 April 2017).

23. By way of an example, in the Western Pacific Region the country cooperation strategies in all countries ensure linkages with the Sustainable Development Goals, set their relevance in the specific national context, and identify activities in support of national efforts to mainstream the Goals in national health strategies, programmes and policies. Five country cooperation strategies that were issued before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda are being updated and will be launched in the coming months.

ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

24. The Health Assembly is invited to note the report.

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