The WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia (SEA) through resolution SEA/RC59/R10 on health information system development relating to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Health Metrics Network urged Member States to consider using the Health Metrics Framework as a tool for health information systems assessment and in enhancing harmonization of country efforts related to the strengthening of health information systems. The resolution also urged Member States to draw up and implement action plans and to use the Regional Strategic Framework and the Health Metrics Framework in data collection to track progress and measure achievements with regard to MDGs and the health status at national/sub-national levels, and requested the WHO Regional Director to assist countries in this endeavour.

In addition, in May 2007, the Sixtieth World Health Assembly through resolution WHA60.27 urged Member States to recognize, establish and operationalize health information systems as a core strategy for strengthening their national health systems.

This progress report highlights the status of Health Metrics Network support in six countries in the SEA Region, particularly with regard to assessment of national health information systems. It also focuses on content, recommendations and country-specific options to be considered after the Regional Strategy for Strengthening Health Information in countries of the SEA Region is disseminated. It describes some important regional activities already conducted (e.g. Regional Consultation on Mortality Statistics) or planned, particularly in the field of health statistics reporting and training on international classification of diseases.

This report was discussed at the Joint Meeting of Health Secretaries and the Consultative Committee for Programme Development and Management held in the Regional Office, New Delhi, 2-6 July 2007. The Joint Meeting made the following recommendations:

**Action by Member States**

1. To build information systems that include disaggregated and evidence-based health information for policy formulation and effective interventions, particularly at sub-national levels.

**Action by WHO-SEARO**

1. To proactively support Member countries to strengthen national health information systems and to build countries’ capacity in collection, analysis and dissemination of the data, particularly at sub-national levels.

The report is now submitted to the Sixtieth session of the Regional Committee for its consideration.
Health information system development relating to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Health Metrics Network (HMN)

1. The 59th session of the Regional Committee for South-East Asia passed the resolution SEA/RC59/R10 (Annex-1): Health information system development relating to Millennium Development Goals and Health Metrics Network.

2. The following activities have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented with Regional Office and WHO country office support:

**Regional Strategy**

- The Regional Strategy for Strengthening Health Information was finalized and distributed to all member countries. It would help the countries to look at all components of their health information systems and identify appropriate activities for its strengthening, with an adequate support of the partners. It consists of ten strategic areas, namely (i) policy development, regulation and legislation on HIS-related issues; (ii) system analysis (health information system design/set-up and maintenance); (iii) promotion of data quality; (iv) appropriate application of information and communication technology (ICT); (v) enhancement of mechanism for effective communication, cooperation and coordination; (vi) development and allocation of HIS resources (human, physical, financial); (vii) strengthening of data sharing, analysis and utilization, at all levels; (viii) strengthening data collection and utilization in decentralized systems; (ix) effective marketing of HIS products, and (x) strengthening linkages between health information system and health research system. It is a Regional Strategy, drafted after several consultative meetings and discussions with Member Countries. The Strategy recommends that since the health information system in countries are at various stages of development and strengthening, the countries may opt for different steps in their plans related to improving their HIS. Alignment of stakeholders and partners in health with the countries’ plans for strengthening HIS would be crucial for successful implementation of the action plan.

**Health Metrics Network**

- The Regional Strategy recommended that the Health Metrics Network (HMN) assessment tool may be used as a standard for reviewing the progress in strengthening various components of the HIS at the national and sub-national levels. Six countries (Bhutan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Timor Leste and Sri Lanka) have been using the Health Metrics Framework for assessment of their health information system and making plans of activities for its strengthening.
Mortality Statistics

- A Regional Consultation on Mortality Statistics was held in April 2007 and outlines of the country specific activities for enhancing the quality of mortality data drafted. There was an urgent need to conduct this regional activity, since the vital registration systems in SEAR countries do not record a vast majority of the deaths. There are also concerns about the quality of information on causes of death, with only a fraction of these deaths being medically certified as to cause. It is expected that the countries would follow-up recommendations from the Consultation, focusing on country specific activities in collaboration with other sectors and partners.

Publications

- Two publications on health situation & health profiles are being finalized as follows: “11 Health Questions about 11 SEAR Countries”, and “Health in Asia and the Pacific, Edition 2007”. These publications would enhance countries’ approach to data collection, analysis and dissemination, particularly with regards to the country and subnational health situation analysis and evidence-based decisions.

Capacity Building

- Two regional activities are under preparation, namely a Regional Workshop on Health Statistics Reporting (end of September 2007), and a Regional Workshop of Trainers on WHO International Classification of Diseases (early September 2007). Expected outcome of Regional Workshop on Health Statistics Reporting is to agree upon & recommend common standard format/ content and process of reporting health statistics. Main objective of the Regional Workshop of Trainers on WHO International Classification of Diseases is to contribute towards national efforts in improving morbidity and mortality coding of diseases and conditions.
Annex 1

SEA/RC59/R10 Health Information System Development Relating to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Health Metrics Network (HMN)

The Regional Committee,

Recalling the Executive Board resolution EB118.R4 and various regional and country activities relating to development and strengthening of health information systems,

Noting with concern the issues and challenges involved in strengthening health information systems, which are common to Member States in the Region,

Recognizing that Member States lack sufficient health information system capacity in terms of both human and other resources, particularly with regard to inadequately trained human resources for applying the latest analytical tools and methods including e-tools to synthesize and disseminate information for decision-making,

Acknowledging that there are other issues and challenges in identified areas of core indicators, data sources, data management, information products and their dissemination and use,

Having considered the commitment of Member States to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and the availability of the Health Metrics Network partnership platform and Strategic Plan for Strengthening Health Information Systems in the Region, and

Recognizing the inconsistencies of published global and regional figures and estimates due to lack of reliable data,

1. URGES Member States:
   • to consider using the Health Metrics Framework as a tool for health information systems assessment and in enhancing harmonization of country efforts related to the strengthening of health information systems, drawing up and implementing action plans, and
   • to use the Regional Strategic Plan, the country action plan and Health Metrics Framework in the collection of data pertaining to MDGs and core health indicators, particularly disaggregated data, in order to track progress and measure achievements with regard to MDGs and the health status at national/sub-national levels, and

2. REQUESTS the Regional Director:
   • to assist Member States in drawing up and implementing their action plans to further strengthening country health information systems;
   • to assist Member States in implementing their plans for strengthening health information systems, particularly in supporting a comprehensive assessment of the countries’ health information system and in drafting their action plans in the context of the Regional Strategic Plan for Strengthening Health Information Systems, and
   • to enhance technical support to Member States towards facilitating the collection of disaggregated data to help in tracking progress and measuring achievements with regard to MDGs and core health indicators at national/sub-national levels.