

**WHO's 68th session of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific
Brisbane, Australia, 9-13 October 2017**

Background of Western Pacific Region of WHO

WHO has six regions. The Western Pacific Region is populated by 1.8 billion people. It has developed countries like Australia and New Zealand, fast growing economies like China and Vietnam, and some of the least developed countries. Altogether there are 37 member states. The diversities in culture, social, economic and political systems are great. The head quarters of the Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) is in Manila. There are also 5 country offices in the region.

WPRO meeting

The Regional Committee meeting is held every year, and the meeting venue alternates between a host country and Manila headquarters. The meeting agendas are prepared 18 months in advance after full consultation with the member states. The communication between WPRO and member states is frequent and is done through face to face committee meetings, paper circulation and video conferencing. The member states are well informed and well prepared before attending the WPRO meeting. There is pre-meeting briefing for Inter-Government Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). IGO and NGO observers can present oral statements at the meeting or submit written statements to the meeting website. The WPRO meeting has a chairman who is from one of the member states. The 2 rapporteurs at the WPRO meeting are also from member states. This increases the amount of engagement and empowerment of the member states in the WPRO meeting.

As well as the meeting proceedings, there are side events at lunch breaks, a book launch reception, and a few dinners hosted individually by the Pacific Islands, Australian (host) government and WPRO Regional Director. The WHO 68th session of the Western Pacific Regional Committee Meeting had more than 300 participants.

The Agenda of the meeting

Within a 5 day WPRO meeting, there are usually 5 technical agenda items and the rest are procedural and governance agenda items. Unusually, this 68th session WPRO meeting had 7 technical agenda items. They were as follows:

1. Measles and rubella elimination
2. Protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing
3. Health promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals

4. Triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis
5. Transitioning to integrated financing of priority public health services
6. Regulatory strengthening and convergence for medicines and health workforce
7. Food safety

The remaining agenda items were as follows:

8. Opening of the session
9. Address by the outgoing Chairperson
10. Election of new officers: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Rapporteurs
11. Adoption of the agenda
12. Address by and Report of the Regional Director
13. Program budget 2016-2017: budget performance (interim report)
14. Address by the incoming Chairperson
15. Progress reports on technical programs
 - 15.1 Health Security and the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies
 - 15.2 Non-communicable diseases
 - 15.3 Tobacco-free initiative
 - 15.4 Mental health
 - 15.5 Tuberculosis
 - 15.6 Hepatitis
 - 15.7 Traditional medicine
 - 15.8 Gender and Health
16. Address by Director-General
17. Consultation on the Draft concept note towards WHO's 13th General Program of Work 2019-2023
18. Coordination of the work of the World Health Assembly, the Executive Board and the Regional Committee
 - 18.1 Agenda for 2018
 - 18.2 WHO reform
 - 18.3 Items recommended by the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board
 - 18.4 Geographically dispersed specialized offices in the Region
19. Special Program of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction: Membership of the Policy and Coordination Committee
20. Time and place of the 69th and 70th sessions of the Regional Committee
21. Closure of the session

At each technical agenda item, the WPRO Director of Project Management (DPM)

presented the program progress, targets achieved, and action plan in the context of each member state.

The final meeting report is released a few months after amendments have been made by all member states.

Website and Mobile App

All the documents of the agenda items are posted on the WPRO website before the meeting date. A mobile app of the WPRO meeting is ready for download by the delegates before the meeting. The mobile app has agenda and timetable, working documents, resolutions and decision, statements by IGOs and NGOs, references and links, tourist information, floor plans, weather, photo feed and bookmarks, and of course FACEBOOK and TWITTER feed. So the meeting is paperless, timely informative, interconnected and interactive among the delegates and WPRO.

The WP Regional Director

The Regional Director is Dr Shin Young-Soo, a global health expert who was elected for a second term. Each term is 5 years. He led a series of reforms of the WPRO in his first term and changed the way WPRO works. His reforms focused on making WPRO transparent, sustainable, efficient, responsive, having good governance and clear relationship with WHO, and most important of all, giving support to the member states at the country level to produce health outcomes. Despite the success of his reforms, Dr Shin continued with the challenge of assisting member states to strengthen health systems towards Universal Health Coverage. Dr Shin spent 200 days of last year visiting member states, country offices and field workers.

The Director General

The Director General is Dr Tedros who is an Ethiopian with a foreign affairs background. His vision of WHO is 'Keep the world safe, improve health, serve the vulnerable'. His emphasis is on program impact and deliverables, not process nor output. He will carry out reforms to change the way WHO is run, to modernize WHO by engaging the private sector, the grass roots, government leaders and politicians. Internally, he will retrain staff and set new guidelines, cut costs and achieve value for money. His General Program of Work 2019-2023 requires a change of mindset, not just technical competence.

Relationships between WPRO and Member States

WPRO sees its 37 member states as stakeholders and partners. Therefore WPRO

always listens to, and always responds to its member states. Together they watch out for any health emergency and handle the emergency as a team. At the WPRO meeting, there was a side event 'WHO performance in Countries'. Via video conference, 5 country offices reported on what they were doing and the challenges they are facing.