

## 2. Enhancing WHO country work with better technology

The WHO Western Pacific Region is vast and covers multiple time zones. For a long time, these prevented many countries in the Region from easily accessing a wide range of expertise available across the three levels and six regions of WHO.

Improving the ways of working across WHO's global, regional and country levels has been a priority of reform in the Region. Upgrades in our information and communication technology infrastructure across the Region have provided a better field of play for collaborative mechanisms.

While stable Internet connections remain an issue in some remote locations, a range of platforms now allows the Regional Office to connect better with country offices, and country offices to connect more easily with each other. Advances in digital technology also help the Regional Office connect with Member States.

Improvements began in 2012 with country offices switching wherever possible from costly satellite connections to better, less expensive alternatives, such as cloud-based videoconferencing. In 2013, desktop phones were also enabled with cameras, allowing video calls to most country offices in the Region and other WHO offices.

During the sixty-seventh session of the Regional Committee in October 2016, all 15 country offices in the Region



Today, any staff member with a WHO-issued mobile device or computer can join a video-conference at any time from anywhere in the world.

were connected by videoconference to a side event showcasing WHO work in countries. Member State representatives applauded the initiative.

These technological solutions have enhanced WHO work, making it easier for staff to work together without the expense and inconvenience of face-to-face meetings. Better connectivity also enhances WHO's work with Member States – providing an alternative to travel for consultations with the Regional Office in Manila. For example, Member State consultations in 2017 on several upcom-

ing Regional Committee items were conducted by videoconference.

The videoconferencing approach allowed for multisectoral and higher-level participation given the small opportunity cost of attendance. There was more meaningful country-level discussion and review of draft strategies, with WHO country office staff facilitating translation and discussion in local languages. The result is a more country-focused approach to development of regional strategies. ■