3. Taking stock of reforms that ensure WHO is fit for the future

When the Regional Director took office in 2009, he embarked on a series of reforms to improve WHO performance in the Region and to ensure Member State priorities were being addressed. The Regional Office conducted a yearlong analysis of reform initiatives, gauging their effectiveness and benefit for Member States and identifying additional steps for reforms to take full effect.

“Our success relies on our capacity to deliver results,” explains Regional Director Dr Shin Young-soo. “It is paramount to any Organization to take stock of what has been done and learn from those experiences to work more effectively in the future.”

With the stocktaking exercise, WHO put previous reform efforts under a magnifying glass to see what works best, in the end operationalizing tried and tested ways to improve support at the country level. In all, the exercise identified more than 800 reform actions – some addressing specific challenges and others tackling deeper structural and systematic needs.

Actions were grouped into six domains. They focused on strengthening WHO support to Member States based on their needs and priorities, and enhancing accountability, efficiency and capacity-building to ensure that progress could be sustained.

In his quest to improve WHO performance at the country level, where it matters most, the Regional Director has introduced a new level of commitment and accountability to country support.
approaches to maintain a strong reform structure that incentivizes performance and encourages the participation of all staff members and stakeholders.

To ensure success, reform mechanisms must be strengthened, the review found. Particular attention must be paid to strengthening performance in three areas: effectively engaging partners, placing the right people in the right places and enhancing communications. Work in these three areas – which will be priorities over the next two years – is already yielding results.

Across the Region, WHO has increased engagement with partners and stakeholders, from improving donor reporting to organizing forums to engage parliamentarians for health. The Regional Office continues to build networks to improve partner participation in support of Member States, such as collaborating centres that provide expertise on all aspects of public health.

To get the right people in the right places, the recruitment process has been reviewed to improve efficiency and reduce on-boarding times. A diverse working group was formed to critique processes and challenges. Senior management has endorsed the group’s recommendations, which include applying a project management approach to candidate selection, developing a roster of independent panel members to ensure the best panel for every selection, and leveraging functions of the Organization’s new recruitment and on-boarding system, Stellis.

To enhance communications, the Regional Director’s Office launched the new Strategic Communications Framework for WHO in the Western Pacific Region in June 2017. A weeklong workshop was also conducted with communications specialists from across the Region and the Organization. The need for clear strategic communications is greater than ever, given today’s increasingly crowded and complex global health and development space.

A comprehensive survey of staff and stakeholders confirmed the strong trust people place in WHO. The survey also suggested ways to reinforce appreciation of the Organization’s work, including a long list of health achievements in the Region.

That relationship of trust will be more imperative than ever as the new era of Sustainable Development begins. Health has finally assumed its rightful place at the centre of the global development agenda, with WHO as the authority entrusted to build cooperation and consensus on health in global development.

For WHO in the Western Pacific, that trust means leaving no one behind in efforts to attain the highest level of health and well-being possible for the Region’s nearly 1.9 billion people.