

# Report of the mid-term evaluation of the Transformation Agenda of the WHO Secretariat in the African Region

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY May 2017



**World Health  
Organization**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Transformation Agenda<sup>1</sup> of the World Health Organization Secretariat in the African Region 2015-2020 was launched by the Regional Director for Africa in February 2015. Its objective is to ensure that the WHO Secretariat in the African Region evolves into the primary leader in health development in Africa and is a reliable and effective protector of Africa's health stock.

The Transformation Agenda has four focus areas: pro-results values, smart technical focus, responsive strategic operations and effective communications and partnerships. The managerial, programmatic and governance themes of the ongoing WHO global reform were factored into its development. It is not only a commitment to positive change in the Regional Office but also a programme for accelerating the implementation of WHO global reform within the Region, with each focus area closely aligned with specific outcomes of the WHO global reform programme.

The Transformation Agenda aims to be bold, ambitious and seeks to engender a regional health organization that is foresighted, proactive, responsive, results-driven, transparent, accountable, appropriately resourced and equipped to deliver on its mandate. The Transformation Agenda also responds to increased expectations of Member States and regional and global stakeholders for a change in the way WHO does business in the African Region. There is anticipation of accelerated implementation and institutionalization of the WHO reform agenda as well as improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of actions in line with the Organization's mandate. Stakeholders want to see an appropriately resourced and equipped WHO that is responsive and effective in strengthening national health systems; coordinating disease prevention and control, including outbreak preparedness and response; and launching supranational actions in support of global health security. Whilst it is a vision and a strategy for change aimed at facilitating the emergence of "the WHO that the staff and stakeholders want", its success will depend on the commitment and cooperation of staff, Member States and partners.

## Background to the evaluation

The Transformation Agenda envisages both a mid-term and a final evaluation of its implementation. It also sets forth activities to be carried out in the first two years, of which some were to be completed within the Regional Director's first 100 days in office from February to April 2015 and the remaining activities were to be completed within the first two years ending in January 2017.

The end of the first two-year period in January 2017 provided an opportune time to undertake the mid-term evaluation, which was carried out as an independent evaluation by the WHO Evaluation Office at the request of the Regional Director.

The evaluation objectives were to review the progress in the implementation of the Transformation Agenda, to document achievements and best practices, to identify challenges and areas for improvement and to provide recommendations on the way forward. It may also serve as a source of baseline material for the final evaluation.

<sup>1</sup> The Transformation Agenda is one of five interrelated and overarching priorities identified by the Regional Director: (i) improving health security; (ii) strengthening national health systems; (iii) sustaining focus on the health-related MDGs/SDGs; (iv) addressing the social determinants of health; and (v) transforming the African Region into a responsive and results-driven Organization.

## Methodology

The evaluation was conducted as a mixed-method approach using a combination of document review, key informant interviews, site visits and an all-staff online survey. The key informant interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face during on-site visits across the different levels of the Region (at the Regional Office in Brazzaville and with the inter-country support teams (ISTs) and WHO country offices in Brazzaville, Harare, Libreville and Ouagadougou). During on-site visits and follow-up video or teleconferences, individual or group interviews were held with senior staff, professional staff, general service staff and the staff associations. The evaluation team also met with senior officials of the Ministry of Health in Burkina Faso, Congo, Gabon and Zimbabwe. Additionally, telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from three key external stakeholder groups (members of the Regional Programme Sub-Committee, members of the Regional Independent Advisory Group, and international partners and donors).

## Findings

The mid-term evaluation finds that the Transformation Agenda is relevant and timely. It is a clear strategy for organizational change guided by the Regional Director's vision. This vision and the need to become a better Organization is well received and accepted by staff in general. It is recognised both internally within the Secretariat and externally by partners that the Transformation Agenda also addresses the reputational difficulties of the Organization in the aftermath of the Ebola crisis. Furthermore, the Transformation Agenda, through its alignment with the WHO global reform, also provides a renewed focus for the reform in the African Region. The evaluation confirms the relevance of the Transformation Agenda's four focus areas and the related expected results.

The evaluation notes reasonable progress towards achieving the aim of the Transformation Agenda to render the Regional Office more effective, timely and efficient in providing the best possible support to Member States. However, any reform will require not only a change in processes but also of behaviours and this takes time. The evaluation notes completion of, and progress in, many activities that were planned and there is also an emerging change in behaviours and mindset. However, there have also been delays in achieving a number of planned activities which has slowed progress, and weaknesses in communication and change management support have led to lack of understanding of the Transformation Agenda and engagement with it among some staff.

Major efforts to support the control of the outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) appear to have had implications for the speed of implementation of the Transformation Agenda during its early phase. Nevertheless, progress was made and key achievements per focus area are noted below.

### 4.1 Pro-results value

The purpose of this focus area is to foster the emergence of an organizational culture that is defined by the values of excellence, team work, accountability, integrity, equity, innovation and openness. The expected results for this focus area are: enhanced accountability by individuals and teams; improved fairness in rewards, recognition and sanctions for staff members; responsive, supportive and inclusive teams; and enhanced ethical standards for the staff.

Completed activities within this focus area include: the launching of the Accountability and Internal Control Strengthening Project, the establishment of the Compliance and Risk Management Committee, and establishing and filling the full-time position of ombudsman in the Regional Office. In addition, a staff welfare officer position was established and efforts are under way to develop and implement staff well-being and welfare programmes at all levels.

## **4.2 Smart technical focus**

The technical areas of WHO's work in the African Region will be prioritized in line with regional priorities and commitments, and interventions will be based on evidence and lessons learned from experience. The expected results for this focus area are: EVD epidemic controlled; strengthened regional capacity for health security, including effective preparedness and timely response to disease outbreaks and emergencies, and polio eradication; accelerated progress on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs); functional cross-cutting systems approach within the WHO African Region facilitating progress towards universal health coverage (UHC); and enhanced knowledge management .

Within this focus area, a number of activities relating to the control of the EVD epidemic have been completed and a recovery and rebuilding strategy is under implementation. Other successful efforts to strengthen regional capacity for health security include: the restructuring of the Regional Office to effectively address outbreaks and emergencies, the prioritization of polio eradication in the Region and high-level advocacy undertaken by the Regional Director in this regard; the definition of mechanisms for effective coordination between the three levels of the Organization in the context of the emergency reform; and the engagement with the African Union to support the establishment of an African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and to support accelerated implementation of the MDGs.

## **4.3 Responsive strategic operations**

The goal of this focus area is to evolve into an Organization with enabling functions that efficiently support the delivery of programmes. The expected results for this focus area are: human, financial and material resources aligned with the identified priorities; strengthened WHO human resource capacity; enhanced transparency in recruitment, placement and performance management; improved efficiency and accountability in the areas of finance, procurement and general management; and improved leveraging and use of available technologies and tools, especially the Global Management System (GSM) and business intelligence dashboards.

A number of activities have been completed in this focus area. For example, accountability and efficiency have been enhanced with the review of delegation of authority in the Region, regional compliance functions have been strengthened and streamlined, and key performance indicators (KPIs) for performance monitoring have been developed. Formal training programmes have also been developed on the use of new technologies. There is progress in the human resources component of the Transformation Agenda with the restructuring process completed in 4 of the 6 clusters in the Regional Office. With regard to the transparency of recruitment and selection process, standard, harmonized recruitment processes were used, in alignment with the processes used for professional positions throughout WHO and a transparent and competitive bidding process for procurement of services is in place. In an effort to ensure staff are well equipped for working in the Organization and performance is appropriately recognised, a mandatory induction programme for newly-recruited staff members has been established, a learning and development needs assessment was conducted and transparency in rewarding good performance has been enhanced. The Regional Director has also made critical senior-level appointments in the Regional Office and in country offices.

## 4.4 Effective communications and partnerships

This focus area seeks to foster a more responsive and interactive organization, internally among staff members and externally with stakeholders. The expected results for this focus area are: enhanced internal communication between and across all the three levels of the Organization; reinforced external communication; and strengthened strategic partnerships.

Activities in this area that have been completed in order to enhance internal communication include the engagement of a communications consultancy firm to conduct an assessment of communications in the African Region, the regular sharing of information with regard to the Regional Director's travel and the outcome of her missions/meetings, and the institution of regular fora for discussing progress in the implementation of strategic programmes. With regard to the reinforcement of external communication, closer working relations with media houses have been established, with regular WHO slots in key television and radio channels within the Region.

### Areas for future focus

Going forward, areas for further work internally include: (i) reviewing the activity workplan to ensure outstanding activities are completed or sunsetted and that further activities are planned; (ii) completing the restructuring exercise in a fair, transparent and participatory manner; (iii) completing the functional reviews in country offices; (iv) providing greater clarity and advocacy on the role of the ISTs and their interaction both within the country offices and with the Regional Office; (v) rolling out the technical KPIs; (vi) strengthening change management and project management efforts; (vii) continuing efforts to engage staff in the activities of the Transformation Agenda, including, where appropriate, increasing knowledge and awareness of staff through briefings or training possibilities; and (viii) ensuring funding for the overall budget of the Regional Office, and the activities of the Transformation Agenda in particular.

In addition, further areas on which to concentrate efforts, both internally and externally, include: (i) strengthening communication, as an integral part of the Transformation Agenda, to cover both internal and external audiences with greater focus in the next phase, including better articulation of success stories and results at the country level; (ii) moving from a process focus to a stronger focus on delivery of results and better communication of the work of the Regional Office in this regard; and (iii) broadening the engagement of Member States and partners in the next phase.

Finally, all the above efforts need to be underpinned by a clear governance structure for the Transformation Agenda.

# Recommendations

1. The Regional Director and executive management team should revisit the activity workplan of the Transformation Agenda, ensuring outstanding activities are completed or sunsetted, and plan activities for the next phase.
  - *consider a second stage launch, targeted at staff and Member States, in order to renew the Regional Director's vision and engage staff, Member States and partners*
  - *the next phase of Transformation Agenda to concentrate on technical focus, delivery and results.*
2. Establish a clear governance structure for the Transformation Agenda with membership made up of the executive management team and staff representatives.
  - *governance team to review progress on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, provide guidance to project team and address any delays or bottle-necks in implementation.*
3. Strengthen the Transformation Agenda project management team with appropriately skilled staff and resources.
4. Develop and implement a change management strategy to institutionalize the Transformation Agenda
  - *identify change agents in regional office, inter-country support teams and country offices*
  - *identify and support champions among directors, WRs and other staff*
5. Develop and implement an effective communication strategy, commencing with a conscious "relaunch" to staff and Member States, recalling the vision and purpose, detailing progress, and recognizing some of the challenges and shortfalls in the first two years.
6. Complete cluster restructuring exercises for General Management and Noncommunicable Diseases clusters, and any other major human resource reorganisation as soon as possible.
7. Provide regular updates on planned functional reviews of country offices and complete these as soon as possible.
8. Encourage active engagement of Member States and partners in the next phase of the Transformation Agenda.