Global Policy Group Retreat, 28 February – 3 March 2017

Summary Report

The Global Policy Group held their annual retreat in Annecy, France, from 28 February to 3 March 2017, chaired by the Director-General and the Deputy Director-General. All Regional Directors were present, and the Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme attended on the second day.

The following report summarizes their discussions and the subsequent decisions of the Director-General.

1. The meeting commenced with a ‘tour de table’ of global and regional developments of political, social and economic relevance to WHO, followed by discussion on the following agenda items.

2. The GPG reflected on their previous discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the feedback from the deliberations of the Executive Board, noting that there is greater clarity on the ‘what’, which needs to be better communicated, but there is still a need for further work to better articulate ‘how’ the SDG agenda for health will be taken forward. A repository of SDG related tools is urgently needed to support countries, including health impact assessment methodologies.

3. The EXD WHE briefed the GPG on the development of the WHO Emergencies Programme, highlighting the importance of country implementation which will require additional investment in some key priority countries, with intensive management and oversight, and a different resource mobilization model to support these changes. The GPG welcomed the focus on countries, and requested the programme to develop training materials and programmes that would contribute to capacity building of country offices. In addition, they highlighted the importance of capacity building at the Regional level; the need to maintain strong links between the emergencies programme and other technical departments; the importance of early reporting of outbreaks in accordance with the IHR; the critical importance of a flexible staff of the programme; and the need for normative tools and guidance for determining the end of an outbreak.

4. The GPG reviewed a draft strategy on WHO’s ambition and action in nutrition for the period 2016-25, which aims to deliver on the six global targets for maternal, infant and young child nutrition, as well as the global diet-related NCD targets. The GPG recognised that WHO has a clear normative, policy and technical cooperation role in nutrition, noting that implementation at the country level must be closely coordinated with other UN organizations and the many partners working in this area. They emphasised the importance of translating policy into action, and requested the WHO programme area network for nutrition to take this feedback into consideration in further development of the draft strategy.

5. The GPG reviewed the draft framework of priorities and guiding principles to promote the health of refugees and migrants, which will be considered by the 70th World Health Assembly in May. Two compacts are also in development through the UN system; the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, for consideration in 2018. The GPG highlighted the importance of collaboration with IOM and UNHCR in the further development of the framework, and recognised that further efforts will be needed by WHO to support Member States in negotiations on the two Compacts.
6. Following the discussions in the GPG in January 2017, a roadmap for strengthening the integration of mental health in primary care was drafted, highlighting mental health care in UHC, using a people-centred approach. The GPG welcomed the roadmap, highlighting aspects of UHC which are particularly relevant to mental health, including community action, financing, and social protection, and encouraged operationalization of the roadmap through the related programme area networks.

7. The GPG discussed the work of WHO in climate and health, and recent developments, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the initiative by Italy to include climate change and health as a substantive theme for the G7 in 2017. The Director-General decided that WHO should seek accreditation to the Green Climate Fund to facilitate access of the health sector to climate finance.

8. The GPG reviewed progress in the establishment of the interagency group for antimicrobial resistance (AMR); the development of national action plans for AMR; work towards a global development and stewardship framework for AMR; and the ongoing discussions on AMR in preparation for the G20 summit hosted by Germany. They emphasised the importance of ensuring the capacity was available in country offices and regions to support the development and implementation of national action plans.

9. The GPG welcomed the progress being made towards increasing equitable access to immunization, and the proposed activities planned for the coming months. They expressed concern at the activities of anti-vaccination groups, which are undermining efforts to protect children and adults from vaccine preventable diseases. The GPG identified the need for further support to countries in sustaining and increasing coverage as they transition to greater domestic financing for immunization.

10. The GPG working group on strengthening category and programme area networks (CPNs) presented its report, making recommendations to institutionalize, empower, enable and promote accountability of the CPNs. The GPG welcomed the report, which proposes a matrix approach, and brings greater coherence to the technical work of WHO. This will require greater clarity on roles and responsibilities and clear lines of accountability, building on the existing management structure of WHO but without adding a decision-making role to the CPNs. This requires a change in culture as well as in management structures and systems, and are linked to other reforms, including resource mobilization and allocation, and will therefore be discussed with the next DG.

11. With regard to budget and finance issues, the GPG discussed the current financial situation for the biennium 2016-17, the proposed programme budget 2018-19, and the development of a new resource mobilization strategy. The reduction in flexible funding is a serious cause of concern, as is uncertainty about the future economic situation and prospects for funding. The GPG discussed measures to address the financial uncertainties and the need to reduce future liabilities by limiting recruitment, reducing travel, and postponing some activities. The GPG reviewed the revisions to the proposed programme budget that will be presented to the WHA in May. Having reviewed the report prepared by an external consultant on resource mobilization, the GPG focussed their discussions on country level resource mobilization, emphasising the importance of strengthening resource mobilization by engaging the Category and Programme Area Networks, by professionalizing this area of work, and by increasing capacity. The Director-General decided to establish a Working Group of the GPG to take this work forward.

12. The GPG was briefed on the process for the DG election in the WHA in May, and the proposals for transition planning. In view of the short period between the election in May and taking office on the 1st July, the secretariat is setting up briefings for the DG nominees ahead of the Assembly to assist them in their transition planning.
13. The GPG carried out its annual review of the corporate process for selecting and appointing HWOs. The key principles remain unchanged; professionalising the position of HWO and the process for selecting them; internationalising HWO positions (with the aim of having at least 30% of HWOs from countries outside the Region); raising the seniority of the position of HWO so that it is commensurate with other UN agencies, and with the complexity and responsibilities of the position; and incentivising the positions to attract suitable candidates, particularly in complex situations. The GPG identified several steps to strengthen the roster of candidates, including the need for a revision of the written test, which forms part of the screening process. With regard to the selection process from the roster, the GPG agreed on the need for a formal competitive process, with advertisement of all positions; establishment of a senior selection committee at the regional office, with membership in accordance with normal HR policy requirements.

14. The next meeting of the GPG will be held on 17 May, at WHO HQ, immediately prior to the governing body meetings.

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