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# Task Force on Health Research Management and Capacity Building

*Report of the First Meeting  
WHO/SEARO, New Delhi, 6–7 March 2008*



**World Health  
Organization**

Regional Office for South-East Asia

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New Delhi, May 2008

## Contents

	<b>Page</b>
1. Opening session .....	1
1.1 Introductory session.....	2
2. Business session.....	2
2.1 Key issues and challenges in research management and capacity building .....	2
2.2 Key strategies for health research management and capacity building .....	3
2.3 Review of research management modules .....	5
2.4 Application of research management modules .....	7
2.5 Planning for intercountry workshop on research management.....	8
3. Closing session .....	8
4. Recommendations .....	9

## Annexes

1. Opening remarks by Regional Director WHO, South-East Asia Region.....	11
2. Concluding remarks by Regional Director WHO, South-East Asia Region.....	14
3. List of participants .....	16
4. Provisional agenda .....	19
5. Provisional programme.....	20
6. List of working documents.....	22



## 1. Opening session

In his opening address, Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia (SEA) Region stated that the Task Force on Health Research Management and Capacity Building was created in pursuance of a recommendation of the 30<sup>th</sup> session of WHO South-East Asia Advisory Committee on Health Research (SEA-ACHR) held at Jakarta, Indonesia from 14 to 16 March 2007. The ACHR has always underlined the importance of research management as a mechanism for ensuring the relevance, quality and effectiveness of health research programmes. The Regional Director asked the Task Force to identify issues and challenges. He further requested the Task Force to develop a strategic framework for capability and for enhancing regional capacity in the countries in the Region in the area of health research management. The Regional Director identified some of the areas which together comprised research management. These included research policy, planning, implementing and coordinating research programmes and communication of research findings in appropriate language to the government and the public. Other components included identifying partnerships and forming networks, enlightened management of researchers, research managers and resources for research. The Regional Director emphasized that while ethical review of research programmes and setting up of institutional ethics committee was important, equally important if not more was the ethical conduct of the researchers themselves. Research managers therefore need to have competencies in several areas. The Regional Director referred to the ten modules which were to be discussed and reminded the Task Force that present-day managers are usually mature persons with wide experience. They, therefore, needed more to be made aware of recent trends in research management and capacity building, rather than to be provided structured training courses. The modules, therefore, should help also in being used as a self-learning package together with the parallel exercise of learning and doing on the job itself.

## **1.1 Introductory session**

Dr Ong-arj Viputsiri, Regional Adviser, Research Policy and Cooperation introduced the participants.

The Regional Director nominated Professor Ranjit Roy Chaudhury as the Moderator of the Task Force, Professor Dulitha Fernando as Rapporteur supported by Dr Than Tun Sein and Professor Harun-Ar-Rashid. Dr Aung Than Batu and Professor Dulitha Fernando acted as facilitators for the Group Work on the modules.

## **2. Business session**

A total of seven members of the Task Force on Health Research Management and Capacity Building, four special invitees, and 15 WHO/SEARO staff members participated at the first meeting of the Task Force of Health Research Management and Capacity Building. The list of participants is provided in Annex 3.

### **2.1 Key issues and challenges in research management and capacity building**

Dr Mahesh Kumar Maskey made a presentation on the key issues and challenges in the countries of the region in the area of research management and capacity building. He stated that although the Member countries in the region have made some progress in building up capacity for research in the last few years, much still remains to be done. He outlined many of the constraints prevailing in the countries of the Region in developing research management capacity building. There was a great shortage of human resources to implement such programmes. In addition, financial resources to support research were meagre and the allocations made were often insufficient to support any sustained programme. Dr Maskey further stressed upon the limitation most countries suffer from – a weak research information system which is essential for carrying out research. In addition to weak leadership and management skills, he stated that there was lack of partnership and networking. The capacity for carrying out ethical review of research proposals was also rudimentary and needed to be created. Weak governance of research was also a characteristic which

was an impediment and which was present in many countries in the Region. Finally, there was absence of a culture which would support research and development of research management in several of the countries of the Region.

## **2.2 Key strategies for health research management and capacity building**

Dr Maskey followed up his earlier paper by making a presentation on the key strategies for Health Research Management and Capacity Building at the national and regional levels. He felt that a starting point could be a Situation Analysis regarding the position of research management and capacity building in countries in the Region. Such an analysis would reveal the existing gaps and needs. Action would then be taken to fill the gaps and fulfill the needs. Such action based on an actual review of the ground situation would enable appropriate steps to be taken. Another point made by the speaker was that the already existing national health research policies in the countries need to be looked at again, particularly in view of the changing disease profiles in the country and emerging disease patterns which are today different from what was existing earlier. Priorities may have to be changed in the changing health scenario in the countries in the region. The rapid advances in science and technology at the global level would have to be kept in mind when allocating research priorities in the country today. It was felt that the National Medical Research Councils need to be more proactive, more dynamic and more responsive in promoting health research in the countries in the Region.

It was felt that WHO could support Member countries in this endeavour by providing stewardship for health research promotion, by identifying training opportunities and by assisting in capacity building. WHO could also provide intercountry networking and linkages between Medical Research Councils in the Region.

### ***Discussions***

Discussions on both presentations were held after the second presentation. There was an active participation by all members of the Task Force and others attending the meeting.

Members of the Task Force observed that there were intercountry differences in the countries in the Region and this had to be kept in mind when planning the strategy for development of Health Research Management and Capacity Building. Another point made was the health managers work at different levels – national, sub-national, institutional levels and also at the programme level and finally at the project level. Any future plan for promoting or creating capacity would need to keep this in mind. There were other differences in the countries. The national health policy and national health research policy would perhaps vary between countries and would thereby affect the strategies. Again, availability of human resources and resources for health research would vary from country to country. This would be true of institutional capability and development of institutes in the countries.

The participants emphasized and highlighted the need for stronger linkages between the national health policy and the national health research policy. They felt that the results of health research shall be utilized to resolve the gaps in implementation of the programmes of the national health policy.

The discussions underlined the need for designing the training programmes keeping in mind the level of persons for whom the training is being provided. The modules being developed would, therefore, have to be fashioned for different levels of persons for whom the training was being provided. The Task Force members also discussed briefly the Health Research Information System available at SEARO and its supportive role in the management of health research in the countries in the region.

Finally, the participants emphasized the point that it was important to look ahead and see what would happen “beyond” the training in research management which was being planned. In order to effectively utilize the persons who would have been trained as research managers, an enabling environment for research and for the research managers will have to be created. It was felt that sharing of experiences relating to research management between countries in the region would be a useful experience.

## **2.3 Review of research management modules**

Dr Than Sun Sein made a presentation providing an overview of all the ten research training modules developed by WHO SEARO. Following this presentation, there was some general discussion before the participants were divided into two groups.

Group I and Group II separately reviewed all ten modules and presented their observations, recommendations and suggestions at the plenary session which then discussed the recommendations as a group and commented on the findings of the two groups.

Modules 1 to 5 were discussed at the plenary session on Day 1, while modules 6 to 10 were discussed at the plenary session on Day 2. The results of the deliberations are given below. There were both general observations and specific observations regarding each module.

### ***General observations***

The members of the Task Force felt that the contents of the modules were rich, comprehensive and informative. Two main suggestions were made to improve the effectiveness of the modules:

- (1) The objectives need to be so worded that, as far as possible, the outcomes could be measured
- (2) The objectives, as far as possible, should be written in a manner to induce behavioural change. Behavioural objectives should be kept in mind when reviewing the modules.

The group felt that in view of its growing importance and relevance to the countries in the region, an additional module should be prepared on Ethics.

Several of the comments made on the specific modules related to minor changes in emphasis and in diction. These will not be discussed here. However, a few suggestions regarding specific modules are given below:

<b>Module number</b>	<b>Title of the module</b>	<b>Suggestions of the task force</b>
Module 1	National Health Research System and Research Environment	Objectives and outcomes shall be, as far as possible, measurable.
Module 2	Health Research Policy, Priorities and Plans	In some cases, objectives are worded to describe activities.
Module 3	Research Programmes/ Project: Formulation and Implementation	In some cases, objectives are worded to describe activities.
Module 4	Capacity Building in Health Research	In some cases, objectives are worded to describe activities.
Module 5	Research Information and Knowledge Management	This module was found to be very relevant and useful. If possible, the contents could be focused to the needs of the research managers.
Module 6	Research Financing and its Management	The Research Mobilization aspect could be strengthened and the concept of "tied" vs. "general" support funds should be dealt with.
Module 7	Utilization of Research Results	The group found this module to be very comprehensive. If possible, some case studies could be included.
Module 8	Research Management: Leadership and Management Skills	It was felt that this module may be modified so that the objectives can be clearly limited to the outcome. Some case studies could be included focusing on health research.
Module 9	Collaboration and Partnership in Health Research	The group felt that this module should include the fundamental principles of collaboration and partnership and should also address the ethical considerations relating to collaboration.
Module 10	Evaluation of Research Institute, Research Policy and Programmes	Case studies to be included.

## **2.4 Application of research management modules**

Dr Ong-arj Viputsiri made a brief presentation on Training Strategy on Health Research Management and Capacity Building for the SEAR countries. He stressed the fact that research management is an integral tool for national health development. These modules could be used for training different levels of health personnel. Dr Ong-arj Viputsiri felt that it would be important for each country to identify a focal point in the country to implement the use of the modules. This local organizer could form a core team, develop the course material and modify the modules as locally relevant. He illustrated how the modules could be made use of for developing policy and in priority setting. Finally, he suggested that time lines should be fixed to carry out the following activities:

Train the trainers in the use of the modules; carry out pilot studies and plan for the Intercountry Workshop.

### ***Discussions***

This presentation was followed by a discussion on the application of the research management modules in Member countries.

The group suggested that while finalizing the modules, help should be taken from experts in education and educational technology. The modules, once finalized, could be tested out on a full scale in different countries. The members of the Task Force agreed upon the fact that there needed to be linkages between the research being carried out and the national health programmes, and that the training in research management should lay stress on this aspect. The possibility of developing a course based on the modules was also discussed and it was suggested that, if possible, such a course could also be developed in the “distance learning” mode.

Finally, the participants reviewed the training activities being undertaken in their own countries and the resources available for these activities. It was felt that there was a great variation between countries in their capacity for training research management. Each country would have to explore the resources available in the country, especially with the universities and management institutes and then plan its activities with support from national resources. Another suggestion made was that the provision of guidelines and providing orientation would help in optimal use of the modules.

The group felt that revision of the modules could be taken up by the Secretariat with the help of a few resource persons. The revised version could be finalized without sending it again to all the members of the Task Force.

The participants felt that the role of the country offices of WHO needs to be strengthened so that they could be the focal point for research promotion and for capacity building in the country in research management.

## **2.5 Planning for intercountry workshop on research management**

The participants discussed the proposal for holding an Intercountry Workshop on Research Management. The plan for holding such a workshop at Bali in June 2008 was presented and discussed by members of the Task Force. They felt that it was important to hold such a workshop as it was a way of reviewing the current status in the countries and to identify different issues prevailing in the countries. They agreed that such a workshop would facilitate exchange of experiences and that it would be a platform for a free discussion and exchange of ideas on research management and capacity building. This would also promote networking between individuals and institutes of the countries in the Region.

## **3. Closing session**

Professor Ranjit Roy Chaudhary summarized the discussions and key issues highlighted by the participants.

He stated that the focus of the participants was not limited to the training modules per se. He stressed the importance and need of creating an 'enabling environment so that those trained in research management with the help of the modules could optimally use this training. He stated that sharing experiences between the countries as regards use of these modules would provide useful guidance to different countries.

The Regional Director, observed that the Task Force had discussed several important issues related to training in research management. He observed that the modules reviewed by the Task Force members could be

used as a tool for enhancing the capacity of research managers. The Regional Director stressed upon the point that these modules could be used as a package for self-learning. In addition to the modules being used in training their immediate use in self-learning should be encouraged This should be encouraged. It would be important, therefore, to develop such a package based on the modules. This would be a very useful and relevant input towards management of health research.

The Regional Director felt that the ethical aspects of research management and governance at the country and intercountry level should be highlighted in the modules and in the self-learning package. He felt that national seminars and workshops should be planned so that a programme aimed at developing the capabilities and enhancing capacity in research management could be initiated. Due attention should also be paid to the collection and dissemination of information regarding research and management of research.

The Regional Director said that WHO would provide guidance to the countries to develop programmes in this field. Centres of excellence in research should be developed in the countries in the Region. The Regional Director reiterated that WHO could provide both technical and financial support for these activities and that the WHO country offices would be involved in this effort.

The Regional Director thanked the Moderator, the Rapporteur and all members of the Task Force for spending their valuable time at this meeting which would contribute towards developing management capacities in the research managers of the countries of the Region. He wished them all a safe journey home.

## **4. Recommendations**

- (1) The Research Management modules should be finalized as soon as possible, keeping in mind the suggestions made by the Task Force members.
- (2) A new module on “Research Ethics” should be prepared and included in the package with the modules already developed.

- (3) The modules should be developed into a self-learning package. The use of this package should be promoted. In view of development of this package, a structured course using the module might not be needed.
- (4) The modules after modification should be sent to the countries. The countries will further modify the modules as necessary and would use this for training. Universities would be consulted in this effort to adapt the modules according to the needs of the country.
- (5) Every country would review the current status of training in research management and also assess the resources available – both technical and financial – for implementation of a programme of training in research management. Based on this, a flexible programme can be introduced keeping also the possibility of online training in mind.
- (6) A platform would be created for senior management persons to share their vision and their experience in this field.
- (7) The Intercountry Workshop should provide an opportunity for participants to exchange their experience in developing research management programmes.
- (8) WHO/SEARO could play a facilitatory and supportive role in developing the programme and could serve as a focal point for exchange of information. The WHO country offices could be requested to play a pivotal role in the countries in organizing similar activities at the country level. Horizontal collaborations between countries could also be developed.

## **Annex 1**

# **Opening remarks by Regional Director WHO, South-East Asia Region**

Task Force members, special invitees and all other participants, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you all to the first meeting of the Task Force on Health Research Management and Capacity Building. At the outset, I thank you for sparing time to attend the meeting in spite of your very busy schedules at home.

The Task Force on Health Research and Capacity Building has been created in pursuance of a recommendation of the 30th session of the WHO/South-East Asia Advisory Committee on Health Research. The ACHR has always underlined the undisputed importance of research management in ensuring the relevance, quality and effectiveness of health research programmes and health research projects. The Task Force is expected to make recommendations, among other things, on building and strengthening the research management capability and capacity in countries, and on what to do and how to do so in such capability and capacity strengthening procedures.

For this meeting, the Task Force will help identify key issues and challenges in health research management, and help develop a framework and strategy for capability and capacity building in health research management in the Region.

At the same time, the Task Force will also help review and improve research management training modules, which are tools for strengthening such capability and capacity at the regional and country levels. Actually, most of the time of the Task Force will be spent on review and improvement of the ten training modules.

Research management is a very broad area, encompassing many issues and challenges. Research management deals with, among other things, research policy and strategy at the global, regional, national, institutional levels, as well as research communication, coordination, networking and partnerships at international and national levels.

Management of Research resources includes funds (distribution among agencies and institutions); budget allocation in countries; investment by

governments in health research; management of human resources; development and retention of researchers; research support staff; and, not less important, research managers.

Some of the prominent issues in dealing with research management are:

- Management of research funds within the institutions to ensure their growth and development.
- Management of research findings, and the promotion of collection, maintenance, dissemination and utilization of research results and data.
- Research capability and capacity.
- The ability of managers and researchers to develop and implement research programmes and projects efficiently and effectively.
- Mechanism and process for research project review to ensure relevance and technical and scientific merit.
- Technically sound research methodology.
- Mechanism and process to ensure adequate ethics in research.
- Ethics committee dealing with ethical aspects of research projects and ensuring that researchers are adequately ethical in the pursuance of their research.

These are only some of the issues and challenges in research management. More are to be found in the training modules 1-10, to be reviewed by the Task Force during the course of this meeting.

We have many things to do in strengthening our research management capability and capacity. We do not have the capacity to do everything at the same time. We have to prioritize what we should do first, and what we might do later.

This priority setting is the issue with research planning which is an important function of research managers. However, research managers need to have competence in all aspects of research management. They should be able to manage efficiently and effectively the research resources and facilities: financial, human, knowledge and information; and research facilities.

Activities to strengthen research management capability and capacity in countries should be accorded the highest priority. Training activities should be organized in countries, targeting primarily the research managers.

In this connection, it may be a good idea to define who the research managers are. This definition, if any, may be just for our own practical operational use and may not be the same as the international standard definition, keeping in mind in the process, that not all people working in research are research managers.

To develop a research institute into a full-fledged centre of excellence requires capable research managers – managers who can efficiently and effectively mobilize, coordinate and utilize all resources for the steady growth and development of the institution.

The structured training course we are now developing is good. It will be more effective if it is in tandem with on-the-job training, learning by doing and learning from experience.

Research managers are usually mature people; they do not actually need a detailed structured training course. They may rather need orientation in the form of study visits to the institutions in other countries and in other regions. Coaching on the job by experienced persons is very important indeed.

I hope that at the end of the meeting we would have a framework, strategy and tool to move forward to strengthen capability and capacity in health research management in the South-East Asia Region.

Finally, I wish the Task Force all the best and all success in its deliberations, and wish all participants an enjoyable stay in Delhi. Thank you.

## **Annex 2**

### **Concluding remarks by Regional Director WHO, South-East Asia Region**

Once again, I sincerely thank the Task Force members, special invitees, and all other participants for their valuable time and contribution. Their combined wisdom will take us a long way in our efforts to strengthen health research management capacity in countries of SEAR.

I thank Professor Ranjit Chaudhury for ably conducting the meeting to successful conclusions. I also thank Professor Dulitha Fernando, Dr Harun-Ar-Rashid and Dr Than Tun Sein for their excellent work in drafting the report, including the conclusions and recommendations. I specially thank Dr Aung Than Batu for his efficient facilitation of the meeting that contributed greatly to the productive deliberations. Also, I thank those who were working behind the scene to make this meeting possible.

I am fully satisfied with the outcome of the meeting. Follow up actions on the conclusions and recommendations will need combined efforts of Member States and WHO. For WHO, the Regional Office and WHO country offices will work closely together in realizing the recommendations of the meeting.

We now have framework, strategy and tool to move forward. These framework, strategy and tool may need review and further modification in the course of their implementation. The Task Force members will be regularly consulted in such a process.

I believe that the training modules are not yet as perfect as we may wish. However, in reality, nothing will be hundred per cent perfect. Let us start using them now. Then from the experience gained, further improvement can always be made in the process of their implementation.

As I said at the opening, research managers are usually mature people. These modules can be useful to them for self-learning. This self-learning can be supplemented with seminar or workshop type activities, whereby two-way communication takes place and the participants can learn from each other. These

activities should take place in countries. WHO will be ready to provide any technical support required.

Let us invest in the strengthening and building capability of our health research managers and invest in strengthening and building management capacity of our health research institutions. There will be a solid foundation for evidence-based development and management of our health research programmes.

Once again, I thank all of you for valuable contributions.

Finally, I wish the Task Force members and special invitees all the best, and a safe journey home.

### Annex 3

## List of participants

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\* Unable to attend

\*\* Unable to participate. Dr Somsak Chunharas  
invited to WHO SEARO from 27-28 February 2008  
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# Unable to participate

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## **Annex 4**

### **Provisional agenda**

- (1) Key issues and challenges in Health Research Management and Capacity Building
- (2) Developing key strategies and activities for regional and national capacity strengthening for health research managers and research institutes.
- (3) Review and suggest any changes required in the Research Management Training Modules
- (4) Finalizing the agenda for Intercountry Workshop on Health Research Management and Capacity Building, to be held in June 2008.

## Annex 5

# Provisional programme

Time	Activity	Person
<b>Day 1 – Thursday, 06 March 2008 (Conference Hall)</b>		
8:45 – 9:00	Registration	
9:00 – 9:40	<b>Opening Session</b>	
	➤ Opening Address	Dr Samlee Plianbangchang Regional Director
	➤ Introduction of participants and Secretariat	Dr Ong-arj Viputsiri Research Policy and Cooperation
	➤ Nomination of the Moderator and Rapporteur	
	➤ Group Photograph	
10:00 – 10:20	Key Issues and Challenges in Research Management and Capacity Building	Dr Mahesh Kumar Maskey (10 minutes)
	<i>Presentations</i>	Prof Dr Harun–Ar–Rashid (5 minutes)
		Prof Dulitha N. Fernando (5 minutes)
10:20 – 11:10	Discussions	
11:10 – 11:35	Key strategies/activities for Health Research Management and Capacity Building at regional and national levels	Dr Mahesh Kumar Maskey (15 minutes)
	<i>Presentations</i>	Prof Dr Harun-Ar-Rashid (5 minutes)
		Prof Dulitha N. Fernando (5 minutes)
11:35 – 12:30	Discussions	

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Person</b>
13:30 – 14:00	An overview of Research Management Modules 1-5	Dr Than Tun Sein
14:00 – 15:00	Group work on Research Management Modules 1-5	Group I (in Conference Hall) and Group II (in Thai Room, Second Floor)
15:20 – 17:00	Discussion and consensus on the Research Management Modules 1-5	Conference Hall

**Day 2 – Friday, 07 March 2008 (Sri Lanka Room)**

08:30 – 09:00	An overview of Research Management Modules 6-10	Dr Than Tun Sein
09:00 – 10:20	Group work on Research Management Modules 6-10	Group I (in Sri Lanka Room) and Group II (in Thai Room, Second Floor)
10:40 – 12:30	Discussion and consensus on the Research Management Modules 6-10	Sri Lanka Room
13:30 – 15:30	Application of Research Management Modules for Research Management Capacity Building in Member countries	Prof Ranjit Roy Chaudhury Prof Dulitha Fernando (Group presentation & discussions in Sri Lanka Room)
15:30 – 16:30	Planning for Intercountry Meeting on Research Management and Capacity Building	(Group presentation & discussions in Sri Lanka Room)
16:30 – 17:00	Concluding session	Dr Samlee Plianbangchang Regional Director

## **Annex 6**

### **List of working documents**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Agenda item 1 | Key issues and challenges in Health Research Management                        |
| Agenda item 2 | Strategies for Health Research Management                                      |
| Agenda item 3 | Key issues in Health Research Management module and its implementation         |
| Agenda item 4 | Planning for Intercountry Meeting on Research Management and Capacity Building |