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Working Group on South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF)

*Proceedings of the Meeting
11–12 June, Bangkok, Thailand*



**World Health
Organization**

Regional Office for South-East Asia
New Delhi, August 2007

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1. Introduction

Considering the vulnerability of the World Health Organization's South-East Asia Region to emergencies, given the fact that 58% of mortalities across the global in the past decade originated in its Member Countries¹, several requests were received from Member States in various forums to establish a fund for emergencies. Some of these requests and recommendations related to the establishment of a fund which supports countries in the Region were:

- Regional Consultation for Emergency Preparedness and Response (27-20 June 2006), which culminated in the Bali Declaration stating the need to "promote the creation of a Regional Solidarity Fund for Emergency Response".
- 24th Health Ministers' Meeting, Dhaka (20-21 August 2006), wherein Member countries recommended the creation of an emergency fund.

Subsequently, an in-house working group was constituted to formulate the details of the proposal for establishing a regional emergency fund, with the Emergency and Humanitarian Action Unit (EHA) as its secretariat.

Draft proposals on the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF) were then submitted to the following meetings for consultation:

- (1) Fifty-eighth Meeting of the Regional Director with WHO Representatives, from 13 to 21 November 2006;
- (2) Regional Consultation for the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund held on 12-13 April 2007.

The Regional Consultation held on 12-13 April 2007 recommended that "a working group be formed under the chairmanship of Dr Sopida

¹ World Disasters Report 2006

Chavanichkul which would meet in Bangkok in June 2007 to discuss and finalize the business rules, including those related to monitoring and reporting". Accordingly, this meeting of the working group was convened in Bangkok, Thailand.

2. Objectives of the meeting

The objectives of the meeting were:

- (1) To discuss and finalize the guidelines for managing the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF); and,
- (2) To discuss and finalize proposed draft resolution/documents to be submitted for consideration by: (a) Joint Meeting of Health Secretaries and Consultative Committee on Programme Development and Management; and (b) the Regional Committee.

3. Opening session

Introductory Remarks were delivered by Dr Roderico H. Ofrin, Acting Regional Advisor, Emergency and Humanitarian Action, with the following points:

- Part of the recommendation of the previous Regional Consultation (held in New Delhi from 12 to 13 April 2007) was to develop the guidelines and principles for the fund. This was to be done by the Working Group and thus this meeting was called.
- Several points and issues for the fund need further deliberation, such as:
 - Criteria for funding: Which emergency qualifies for funding?
 - Estimates for funding: How much should the corpus of the fund be?
 - Funding needs: How will the funds be used?
 - Principles of the fund: Defining issues such as promptness need further discussions.

Dr Sopida Chavanichkul was elected chairperson in the previous meeting and as such the floor was turned over to her. The chairperson then welcomed the participants and encouraged them to contribute extensively to the discussions as this was a very important initiative for the Region and the needs of all the Member countries. This was followed by self-introduction of participants.

4. Presentation of the recap of the Fund

Dr Ofrin then presented a recap of how the SEARHEF came into its current form:

Representatives from Member States in various meetings (as previously mentioned) have suggested the establishment of a regional fund that can be used during emergencies.

SEARO created a Working Group to develop the proposal for the fund, and this was further refined in subsequent consultations as mentioned in the Introduction.

The following were the conclusions from those consultations/meetings:

- One percent of regular budget (source may be multi-country activity) will form the initial corpus of the fund and these will be pooled. The funds will also have an extra budgetary component.
- The pooled funds will be located in the Regional Office.
- WHO financial rules will apply. As such, RB cannot be rolled over to the next biennium but the EB component can. Donor agreements should allow for carry-over for EB funds mobilized.
- The scope of funds will address needs in the response phase and will cover a period of up to one month.
- Guidelines, processes and criteria were to be discussed in a subsequent meeting by a working group for the fund (the present meeting).
- Monitoring and reporting of the fund will be done through a working group composed of Member States.

5. Discussion points for policies, principles and guidelines

The method followed was to review the previous paper by section and revise accordingly. The following points were then discussed:

5.1 General issues

The paper that will guide the management of the fund and its guidelines, principles and policies should be fairly general and open, so that there will be room for adjustment and improvement.

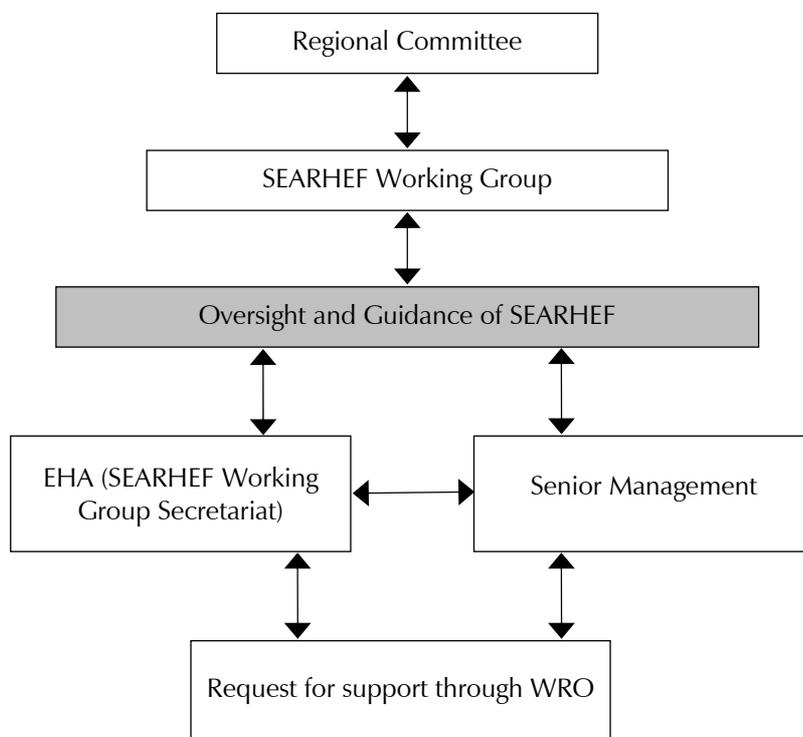
It would be best that the fund be established and other issues such as rolling over of Assessed Contributions (AC)/Regular Budget (RB) to the next biennium will be followed up as the fund is implemented. The document and guidelines cannot be perfected first prior to proposing the fund.

5.2 Governance and roles of Member States

It was pointed out by the group that the governance of the fund and role of member states should be well defined. The following points were then highlighted:

- Representatives from Member States will compose the Working Group and will be responsible for oversight and guidance.
- A working group will be set up to provide oversight and guidance to the management of the fund in accordance with guidelines and principles outlined in this paper.
- It will conduct parallel meetings in conjunction with SEARO statutory meetings.
- The emergency and humanitarian action unit of SEARO will act as the secretariat to the Working Group.
- It was felt by the group that its existence should be reviewed by the Regional Committee and will consider its continued need after two bienniums.

The diagram below illustrates the Working Group and its relationship to existing structures:



5.3 Principles

It was then noted that the paper describing the fund should describe the principles that should guide its management. The group has narrowed down the principles to five:

- Equitable use
 - All Member countries will have access to the fund as per the above criteria.
- Adequacy and replenishment
 - Immediate release will be limited to US\$ 40 000 for the first month.
 - A ceiling shall be set for each emergency amounting to US\$ 200 000.
 - The fund should be replenished once it is depleted at a certain percentage (30%).

- Transparency and accountability
 - EHA will regularly report to the Working Group regarding the status and utilization of the fund
 - The Working Group will monitor and review the management of the fund on behalf of the Member States.
 - The Working Group shall report to Member States in statutory meetings of WHO-SEAR.
 - Member States will be accountable for appropriate utilization and reporting requirements.
 - The fund will be subject to WHO auditing processes.
- Promptness
 - The initial allocation should be released not later than 72 hours upon receipt of the request.
- Ability to mobilize resources
 - An action plan for resource mobilization from Other Sources (OS) should be established and ready for implementation from January 2008.

5.4 Criteria for allocation of funds for emergencies

The group had long discussions on the criteria for funding emergencies. It was very difficult to get to specific and precise criteria as these do not apply with all the countries. For example, over 10 000 people displaced may be a big emergency for a small country but not for a big one. Consensus on external criteria were then decided and these are stated as:

The fund will be used for emergencies, whether natural or man-made, in which the following may occur:

- Declaration of a state of emergency;
- official request for external assistance by the national government; or
- appointment of a humanitarian coordinator by the UN Secretary General for that particular emergency.

It was pointed out that it would be difficult to have definite criteria and thus this matter should be reviewed by the Working Group and adjusted periodically.

5.5 Funding needs and estimates

It was discussed and presented by EHA that based on experience from previous emergencies, expenditures for operations covering a period of six months average around US\$ 450 000 to 500 000. The main expenditure for medium-sized emergencies includes items and services such as procurement of essential medicines and supplies, logistical support (e.g. transport, communication), public health interventions, operational field presence, staff and technical support to national and sub-national health authorities.

On this basis, with an estimate of five emergencies per biennium, the target corpus for SEARHEF works out to be approximately US\$ 2.5 to 3 million.

Although the fund will not support the full six months needs of an emergency, this estimate for the corpus of the fund is given so that there is leeway for:

- (1) More emergencies in the year than expected;
- (2) more underfunded emergencies (meaning there will be no CERF, or CAP); and
- (3) eventually the fund should also have more of a Voluntary Contributions (VC) component, so the targets should be set with that in view.

5.6 Building the corpus of the fund

For the corpus of the fund, the following points were agreed upon:

SEARHEF will be composed of two distinct portions:

- (1) AC from biennial allocation, and;
- (2) VC from donors, countries and other agencies; Member countries

AC portion: up to an amount of US\$ 1 million per biennium.

VC will be mobilized to:

- (1) raise ceilings for allocations; and
- (2) relieve countries from their part of AC. The target for the VC portion is initially set at US\$ 1.5 to 2 million.

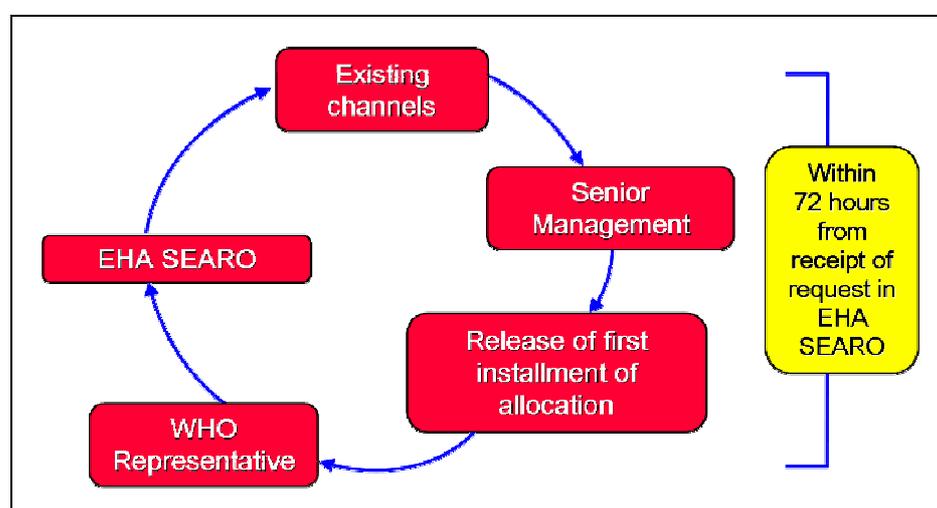
Efforts will be made by WHO/SEARO to seek approval for an exception to prevailing financial rules to allow carry-forward of the AC portion of the fund. This is critical to the spirit and concept of the fund.

Contributions from Member States for AC will be reviewed according to the progress made from resource mobilization of VC.

The Regional Office, country offices and Member States will exercise all efforts to mobilize VC for the fund.

5.7 Management and processes

Below is a diagram depicting the process for requests:



As the secretariat of the SEARHEF Working Group, EHA will:

- (1) Translate policy guidance from the Working Group;
- (2) oversee the prompt disbursement to countries;
- (3) facilitate the resource mobilization of VC for the fund;
- (4) facilitate periodic review of principles and guidelines of the fund; and
- (5) report to the senior management of SEARO and to the Working Group at regular intervals.

5.8 Processing requests and reporting

The following steps were put together by the group for processing requests:

- (1) WRs of affected countries, based on preliminary information available on an emergency, would make a request EHA/SEARO for initial assistance. EHA/SEARO would then, through proper channels, coordinate release of the first installment of allocations. Subsequent requests for assistance would also follow the same procedure.
- (2) Turn around for release of allocations will not exceed 72 hours upon receipt of a request.

5.9 Ceilings on releases

- The initial maximum amount to be released is US\$ 40 000. The time period for implementation will be one month from the date of the initial release.
- Subsequent release with a maximum of US\$ 160 000 will depend on, *inter alia*: the scale of disaster, availability of funds under SEARHEF and assessment of future needs. The time period for implementation for this release will be the next two months.

5.10 Limits and WHO financial rules

- SEARHEF funding cannot be used beyond three months from the date of the emergency.
- Reporting requirements for the expenditure of the allocations of the fund will follow the requirements of the WHO mechanism chosen (e.g. APW, DFC).
- Details of expenditure should be kept in the WHO country office for audit and record as per standard WHO practice.

Annex 1
Agenda

- (1) Opening Session
- (2) Recap of conclusions from the previous Regional Consultation
- (3) Drafting Guidelines for SEARHEF
- (4) Drafting of the Resolution for the Regional Committee
- (5) Closing Session

Annex 2

List of participants

Bangladesh

Mr Mohammed Golam Quddus
Joint Secretary (Hospital)
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Bangladesh Secretariat
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bhutan

Mr Nado Dukpa
Deputy Secretary
AFD, Ministry of Health
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India

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Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
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Indonesia

Dr Rustam S. Pakaya
Head of Crisis Centre
Ministry of Health
Republic of Indonesia
Jakarta

Sri Lanka

Dr Dula de Silva
Deputy Director General (PHS)
Ministry of Health
Sri Lanka

Nepal

Dr Manas Kumar Banerjee
Director
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Department of Health Services
Teku
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Dr Sopida Chavanichkul
Director, Bureau of International Health
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Technical Officer, Emergency and
Humanitarian Action

Administrative Support

Mr Nand Kishore
Secretary, Emergency and Humanitarian
Action

Annex 3

Programme

11 June 2007 (Day 1)

08:30–9:30	Registration	
9:30–10:00	Introductory session	
	Opening Address	
	Welcome Remarks	
	Introduction of participants and Secretariat	<i>Dr Sopida Chavanichkul</i> Director, Bureau of International Health, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health Thailand
	Election of the Chair, Co-Chair and Rapporteur	
	Group Photograph	
10:00-10:20	Tea/coffee	
10:20-10:30	Recap of development of SEARHEF	<i>Dr Roderico H. Ofrin,</i> Ag. Regional Advisor – Emergency and Humanitarian Action (Ag.RA-EHA)
10:30-12:30	Discussions on Guidelines for Building the Corpus of the Fund	
12:30-13:30	Lunch	
13:30-15:00	Discussions on Guidelines for Utilization of the Fund	
15:00-15:30	Tea/Coffee	
15:30-17:00	Discussions on Guidelines for Disbursement of the Fund and Replenishment	

12 June 2007 (Day 2)

08:30-10:00	Discussions on Guidelines for Reporting, Formation of a secretariat and Review of guiding regulations	
10:00-10:30	Tea/Coffee	
10:30-12:00	Finalization of the Policy Document and Guidelines	
12:00-13:00	Lunch	
13:00-15:00	Drafting of Resolution	
15:00-15:30	Concluding remarks	