



Country Ownership Strategies:  
Asia Pacific Leadership Forum on Health Information Systems

## Investing in HIS Leadership Capacity for Impact



## Leadership Forum Series on Health Information Systems

### A Summary of the Asia Pacific Leadership Forum on HIS June 13-16, 2011 Manila, Philippines

*It was wonderful to learn and share our HIS lessons and next steps with colleagues within the region.*

—Bounfeng Phoummalaysith, Deputy Director General,  
Lao PDR Ministry of Health

#### Key Forum Outcomes Achieved:

- *Asia Pacific Forum* participants recognized and articulated the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration to strengthen country led and country owned HIS.
- Each country team developed an action plan to address priority HIS gaps.
- Requests for technical assistance and support can be channeled through WHO WPRO to be shared with donors and partners, who are committed to review and respond to support requested as a follow-up to the *Forum*. A resource request form and guidelines were forwarded to country team delegates.
- The Virtual Leadership Development Program (VLDP) will launch on July 18, 2011. Application forms have already been received from Thailand, Fiji, Laos, Philippines, Bangladesh and Vietnam. All country teams are expected to register and participate in the VLDP.
- Country teams and donors committed to continue their involvement as leaders and change agents, and stay committed to the HIS strengthening agenda including the promotion of regional networking opportunities.
- The 17 donors and development partners associated with the *Forum* commit to better coordinated follow up and networking to aid with country HIS strengthening.

#### Context and Background:

Accurate, good quality, and reliable health data on health outcomes, service delivery indicators and the overall performance of the health system is essential for assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating health interventions and health trends in the country. The goal of a functional Health Information System (HIS) is to provide that information at all levels of the system and serve as a tool to help pursue better health outcomes.

Owned and managed by the country, a functional HIS has as its basis common standards and a unified architecture that can help stakeholders to focus on building awareness about the importance of data driven decision making; strengthen demand for information; enhance governance, leadership and various capabilities within the national health and information system to meet that demand; improve quality of data; and foster a culture of information use.

A functional HIS implies that there is a sustainable system in place that produces and disseminates various reports and information products aimed at different audiences for use in surveillance, program planning, service and resource management, decision making and national and international reporting.

This was the third meeting in the *Leadership Forum Series on Health Information Systems*. The first two fora were held in Africa: in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in August 2009, and in Windhoek, Namibia in October 2010.

The primary goal of the forum series is to foster country ownership and leadership in meeting the challenges to building national HIS. These challenges include governance and multi-sectoral engagement, strategic planning and financing, policy and regulatory environments, infrastructure, human and institutional capital, system standards and interoperability, and information quality and use. The emphasis on ownership acknowledges a change in the relationship between national governments and donors, and the desire to increase recipient control over planning and implementation of donor funded projects. The target audience was senior policy and political leaders, rather than technical experts at the project level.

### **Asia Pacific Leadership Forum on HIS Overview:**

#### *Forum Objectives, Planning and Organization*

The third *Forum* in the series took place in Manila, Philippines in June 2011 and brought together nine countries in the Asia Pacific region. This document provides a quick post-event summary; a fuller report will be made available later.

The specific objectives of the *Asia Pacific Forum* included:

1. Delegates will broaden their perspectives on implementation options, challenges and roles related to health information systems by interacting with colleagues from other countries and sectors.
2. Delegates will develop a shared awareness of the roles of various sectors in strengthening HIS and the options and strategies for improving cross sector coordination.
3. Delegates will explore leadership roles in managing health information systems as a national asset.
4. Delegates and donor participants will work together to develop preliminary action plans to promote stakeholder engagement and commitment to HIS.
5. Donor participants will highlight relevant follow-on resources (information, financial and technical assistance) available in their respective sectors to strengthen HIS.

The *Forum* was hosted by the Department of Health, Government of the Philippines, and brought together senior leaders from government ministries of nine Asian countries—Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Thailand, Philippines, and Vietnam—to share experiences and develop strategies and plans for improving multi-sectoral coordination of country led HIS. More than 120 *Forum* delegates explored leadership roles in managing HIS, and worked together to develop action plans to improve coordination in this area across sectors.

Each country team had an average of 6 – 9 delegates comprising representatives from ministries of health, finance, planning, vital statistics and information and communications technology.

The strategic participant invitation process, identifying and orienting a Point of Contact for each country, as well as a meeting design that capitalized on having the right people in the room, resulted in a successful event. To promote south-to-south dialogue among the participants—a key aim of the *Forum*—the facilitation team used a highly-dedicated participatory approach designed to facilitate knowledge and experience-sharing across sectors. In carefully constructed country team working group sessions, participants addressed key topics, with guiding questions, and facilitators who helped to build on the key issues as they were discussed. Using this methodology, the groups focused in-depth on the major HIS challenges each country is facing, the solutions being tried at the country level and in the region, and possible directions for the future. All participants learned and contributed, paving the way for post-Forum follow-up cooperation.

***Team Fiji had a fruitful and insightful exchange at the Leadership Forum and we are ready to forward the agenda of an efficient and effective HIS in the country, with the foundation of multi-sectoral collaboration.***

—Devina Nand, Fiji Ministry of Health

Multi-sectoral country delegates were joined by representatives from USAID, the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Rockefeller Foundation, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Canada International Development Research Center (IDRC), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), and the University of Queensland HIS Knowledge Hub (HIS Hub). A total of 17 donors, technical agencies, and development partners provided financial, technical, and post-*Forum* commitment to follow up. The Asia Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, Norad, DfID, Health Metrics Network, and AusAID are engaged but were unable to participate in person at the *Forum*. The donors and partners have agreed to support better coordinated technical assistance and improved networking to aid countries more effectively with HIS strengthening.

Forum organization and facilitation were provided by the Training Resources Group, Inc. (TRG). An advance survey on HIS in the invited countries as well as the creation of impact stories was conducted by Futures Group International. The USAID-funded AIDSTAR-Two project with Management Sciences for Health (MSH) served as Secretariat, providing organization, coordination, technical and logistical support services for the event. The Department of Health, Philippines and the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) in Manila provided invaluable local and regional coordination, facilitated the participant nomination and invitation process and generously contributed to many other conference convening services and support.

## Organizational Development and Facilitation Resources

Expertise in leadership, governance, organizational development and change management are essential to negotiate/facilitate a high-level, multi-ministry (and other stakeholder) agreement to strengthen national Health Information Systems. Thus, we recommend that country teams add staff with these skills and experience to their teams as they are needed (usually for short-term support). The governance, organizational development and change management team members would offer expertise in the following areas:

- Country Ownership/Leadership and Institutional Assessments
- Strategic Planning and Program Visioning
- Planning and Managing Organizational Change
- Teambuilding
- Collaborative Planning and Partnerships
- Advocacy Skills
- Facilitation Skills

Donors and other partners can offer some short-term technical assistance in these areas.

The websites for the Training Resources Group (TRG), AIDSTAR-Two and Management Sciences for Health offer additional tools and information, and can be accessed at:

[www.teamstarproject.org](http://www.teamstarproject.org)

[www.aidstar-two.org](http://www.aidstar-two.org)

[www.msh.org](http://www.msh.org)

## Follow-Up Actions Underway:

- **Fiji:** A new HIS Strategic Planning Work Group—pre-arranged and facilitated by WHO in conjunction with the *HIS Forum*—was formed and met on June 22<sup>nd</sup> to review and endorse their action plan and outline their detailed timeline and delivery of their first national, costed HIS Strategic Plan (HISSP) to be finalized in October. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and AusAID expressed interest in supporting implementation of the Fiji HISSP. SPC welcomed USAID assistance with organizational development support coupled with their technical support.
- **Indonesia:** The GIZ Senior Technical Advisor dedicated to HIS strengthening support to the Ministry of Health is already proactively following up with Forum participants, managers, and decision-makers to maintain momentum. Issuance for the setup of an inter-sectoral HIS committee directive has already come from the Minister of Health.
- **Laos:** The *HIS Forum* delegation held a 'reunion' meeting on June 27<sup>th</sup> and agreed to finalize the action plan, complete costing of its existing comprehensive HIS strategic plan, reconstitute its HIS Task Force within the next 30-60 days with additional membership from

non-health sectors, and work on developing a national data dictionary and address unique patient IDs with support from WHO.

- **Philippines:** The Department of Health and the National TeleHealth Centre hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Philippines 'Connectathon' on June 17<sup>th</sup> immediately following the *Forum* with more than 50 participants from the Philippines ICT for Health (ICT4H) technical working group (public/private partners and implementers) and HIS Forum colleagues from Fiji, Thailand, and Vietnam to address consolidated indicator management using health data and metadata standards. The Philippines Health Information Network (PHIN) has agreed to expand and incorporate multi-sectoral membership.
- **Thailand:** Participants from Thailand and the Philippines agreed to coordinate a consolidated request for technical assistance to submit to the 17 *Forum* development partners to be signed by all nine participating governments to support a community collaborative for knowledge and information sharing and peer-to-peer assistance and capacity support.
- **Vietnam:** The Vice Minister of Health requested the Health Partners Group (HPG), the sector-wide coordination mechanism for donors and partners, to endorse establishment of a HIS Technical Working Group to better support and coordinate country led HIS strengthening and eHealth activities.