



ASEF NETWORK FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

2009 – 2013
Asia & Europe

Brief

Network Background:

Many challenges to our societies often require cross-border solutions and international co-operation. One of these challenges is the spread of infectious diseases that emerge (or re-emerge) from the interfaces between animals and humans and the ecosystems in which they live. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant international agencies identify a number of factors including the exponential growth in human and livestock populations, rapid urbanization, rapidly changing farming systems, closer integration between livestock and wildlife, forest encroachment, changes in ecosystems and globalisation of trade in animal and animal products.

For anyone in either Asia or Europe, a pandemic outbreak is a frightening prospect given the increasing inter-dependency in terms of trade, finance, tourism and people to people exchange between the two regions.

Cognisant of the urgent need to address this challenge, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) leaders at the 7th ASEM Summit (2008) stated their determination to combat a possible human influenza pandemic. Reflecting this strong political statement, the Japanese Government expressed its willingness to take the lead on the issue of pandemic control in ASEM by initiating the "ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza", which includes a Network component (1) and a Stockpile component (2).

At the 9th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in May 2009, participants have again expressed deep concern and called for global solidarity and concerted actions, including those by the World Health Organization, other international institutions and ASEM, to tackle the influenza A (H1N1) outbreak. They encouraged new initiatives for transparent and effective response to and prevention of human pandemics. ASEM leaders highlighted their renewed commitment to regional and international cooperation in coping with non-traditional security issues, in particular trans-boundary and cross-continental disease transmission.

Launched at this occasion, the ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza will be seen in the future as an important milestone for the ASEM process - combining as it does the twin features of the stockpiling of anti-viral drugs together with the building of the first platform to deal with public health issues between Asia and Europe.

The ASEF Network for Public Health is implemented and managed by the Asia-Europe Foundation. It reflects the strong ASEM political will to reinforce national capacities in promoting increased collaboration and exchange of experience among the two regions.

Objectives:

- Supporting bi-regional collaboration on pandemics and infectious diseases;
- Promoting multi-sector initiatives on pandemic influenza planning and response;
- Enhancing general public awareness.

Partners

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, MOFA (*ASEM Financial Contributor*)
- Asia-Europe Foundation, ASEF (*Implementing Agency*)

Members of the Advisory Group:

- ASEAN Secretariat, ASEC (*Regional Strategic Partner*)
- European Commission – Directorate General for Health and Consumers, EC-DG SANCO (*Regional Strategic*)

Partner)

- International Organization for Migration, IOM (*Technical Advisory Agency*)
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – Asia Pacific Zone, IFRC (*NGO Partner*)
- Nestle (*Business Sector Partner*)
- UN System Influenza Coordination, UNSIC (*Technical Advisory Agency*)
- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – Pandemic Influenza Contingency, UNOCHA-PIC (*Technical Advisory Agency*)

ASEM co-sponsor countries (political support):

Hungary, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Pakistan, Poland, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam

Description:

ASEF Network for Public Health aims to establish a working mechanism for bi-regional coordination and collaboration on public health issues with a particular attention to pandemics and infectious diseases.

The Network addresses the main challenges raised by the emerging infectious diseases having high pandemic potential and significant socio-economic impacts.

The Network involves a wide range of organisations from public/private sectors, civil society and governments, dealing at international, regional, national or local levels.

Structured on three thematic working groups, the Network facilitates a continuous working process among members to achieve tangible outputs to support policy and decision making.

The main purpose of the TWG 1 on 'Regional integration and infectious diseases' is to:

- Assess current situation, weaknesses, strengths and gaps of regional integration to combat infectious diseases;
- Transfer experience and working methods between Asia and Europe on topics of common relevance.

The TWG 2 on 'Multi-sector pandemic planning and response' will use the scenario-building approach to:

- Raise awareness of multi-sector approach toward pandemic preparedness;
- Lead major authorities, essential service sectors and non-health sectors to gather and share systematic insights and information for preparation of business continuity plans;
- Build up multi-stakeholders' partnership for concerted efforts to enhance pandemic preparedness and contingency planning.

The framework of the TWG 3 on 'Public health dialogue' will be based on existing ASEF programmes to:

- Enhance general public awareness on public health issues;
- Promote sharing experiences between Asia and Europe on specific public health-related topics;
- Increase the ASEF Network's visibility.

The Network's activities are articulated on three main pillars, reflecting the ASEF field of expertise:

- I. Experience and expertise sharing;
- II. Capacity building and research;
- III. Communication and information dissemination.

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