

# Country Office Evaluation - Kyrgyzstan

## Evaluation brief – April 2020

### Context

Country office evaluations were included in the Organization-wide evaluation workplan for 2018-2019, approved by the Executive Board in January 2018. They encompass the entirety of WHO activities during a specific period and aim to provide findings, recommendations and lessons that can be used in the design of new strategies and programmes in-country.

### Objectives and scope of the Evaluation

The main purpose of this evaluation was to identify achievements, challenges and gaps and document best practices and innovations of WHO in Kyrgyzstan on the basis of its achievements over the period 2014-2019. These not only included results achieved by the WHO Country Office (WCO) but also contributions at regional and global levels to the country programme of work.

### Key findings and conclusions

**Question 1:** Were the strategic choices made in the Biennial Collaborative Agreements (BCAs) (and other relevant strategic instruments) the right ones to address Kyrgyzstan's health needs and coherent with government and partners' priorities?

The WCO's priorities identified in the BCAs for 2014-2015, 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 are well aligned with national health strategies. Overarching priorities of the BCAs were all deemed highly relevant by national stakeholders. BCAs are developed in close collaboration with the MoH, and bi-annual reviews of the BCAs undertaken jointly by the WCO and the MoH ensure the continued relevance of the WCO's programme of work throughout the course of implementation. The BCAs are also aligned with WHO's General Programme of Work, EURO's Health 2020 strategy, as well as the UN Development Assistance Framework. However, several national health priorities were identified that have not been adequately addressed in the BCAs. In an effort to make its programming more strategically focused, the BCA 2018-2019 has increased its focus on NCDs while moving away from communicable diseases, especially HIV, hepatitis and TB. However, these diseases still constitute a major health problem for the population.

Considering the importance of having a strategically focused programme of work, it is particularly important that the WCO ensure that its priorities are based on sound analysis of its comparative advantage

and that of other partners in the country so as to ensure that any gaps in addressing national health priorities are filled.

Other priorities that were only lightly reflected in the BCAs were the social determinants of health, as well as health and the environment. These priorities are increasingly important to WHO and EURO for addressing equity issues and ensuring that marginalized populations live in an enabling environment that allows them to live a healthy life. By further integrating social determinants of health as well as health and the environment into its programme of work, the WCO would be better positioned to address equity and gender equality issues that have only been partially addressed in the BCAs. In order to fully achieve the SDGs and health-related targets, a multisectoral approach is warranted.

**Question 2:** What is the contribution/added value of WHO toward addressing the country's health needs and priorities?

All consulted stakeholders, Government and partners alike, recognised the important work undertaken by the WCO. The WCO has conducted a wide range of activities, from providing technical advice and training to producing knowledge and facilitating multi-stakeholder discussion on health-related issues. One central example of the WCO's work that has led to results is the strategic and technical support provided by the WCO to the Government of Kyrgyzstan for the development of the 2030 National Health Strategy. It has also enhanced emergency preparedness and increased Government capacity to comply with IHRs. Through several studies and advocacy efforts, the WCO also effectively contributed to positioning the issue of NCDs on the national agenda.

Despite these achievements, the extent to which they have led to outcome-level results remains unclear. This could be owed to the fact that, despite some efforts in refocusing its programme of work, the WCO still addresses numerous priority areas and associated outputs. Additionally, the WCO lacks a theory of change within a broad and long-range strategic approach, which could help it better articulate the results chain between outputs and outcomes.

EURO has provided valuable support to the WCO and the Government of Kyrgyzstan during the period under

review. Support provided to HIV efforts was particularly valued, given the burden of the disease in Kyrgyzstan and the deprioritization of this area in the BCA 2018-2019. However, some staff highlighted that since the WCO now has more capacity, a reduction in the number of missions conducted by EURO might be warranted.

The strong relationship between the WRs and the MoH was identified as an important factor facilitating the ownership of policies and strategies developed with WCO support. However, budget allocated to the health sector remains limited and the MoH still lacks capacity in public health, which could hinder the Government's ability to implement this strategy.

### **Question 3:** How did WHO achieve the results?

Throughout the period assessed in the evaluation, the WCO undertook all core functions, although the core function of technical support and capacity building was predominantly undertaken in the BCA 2014-2015. With the arrival of a new WR in 2015, the WCO began to increasingly exercise its core function of leadership by repositioning itself as a leader in the health sector. The core functions of knowledge and dissemination and policy advice were also widely undertaken as the WCO produced a wide range of studies and analyses that fed into the development of policies and strategies. However, stakeholders noted that there was room for the WCO to further support the Government's own research agenda.

Following the arrival of the WR, the WCO embarked on a transformation process in 2017 that resulted in the development of a strong strategic vision for the WCO. Additionally, this process led to an increase in the number of programme staff, more training and team building opportunities for WCO personnel, and increased staff motivation. Following the transformation process, resources for Category 6 (Corporate Services and Enabling Functions) more than quadrupled, which allowed the office, among other things, to introduce several administrative positions and a position of communications officer, all of which were crucial to the functioning of the WCO and its visibility in the country. As Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) resources are nearing an end, the office will need to look for other funding sources, which might prove challenging as several donors prefer providing funding for programmes but not administration. Securing these resources will be key if the WCO wishes to maintain the leadership, visibility and traction that it has gained among partners of the health sector in Kyrgyzstan as part of the transformation process.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The WHO Country Office should capitalise on the significant momentum it has achieved in enhancing its strategic partnerships at country level to better contribute towards improving the health status in Kyrgyzstan.

**Recommendation 2:** The Regional Office for Europe and the Head of the WHO Country Office should elaborate a longer-term strategic planning instrument – extending over a period of multiple future Biennial Collaborative Agreements, and over the period of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and beyond – that ensures a good strategic fit with the unmet needs of Kyrgyzstan, the directions set by its Government in the 2030 National Health Strategy, the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, the Sustainable Development Goals and WHO's comparative advantage.

### **Recommendation 3:**

- I. In order to sustain the momentum achieved through the WHO Country Office transformation process, the WHO Country Office should ensure adequate follow-up on key initiatives is maintained so that its gains are sustainable and staff remain motivated to contribute to the significant work ahead in supporting implementation of the 2030 National Health Strategy.
- II. In order to sustain the momentum achieved through the WHO transformation process, the WHO Country Office should liaise with the Regional Director and his team to ensure that the support of the Regional Office for Europe continues to maximally enable the work of the WHO Country Office in its support to implementation of the 2030 National Health Strategy (and, by extension, attainment of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals).

**Recommendation 4:** The WHO Country Office staffing and skills mix should be assessed in the light of the priorities, addressing gaps for relevant areas and providing capacity building opportunities to existing staff in order to be better prepared and respond more effectively to the emerging strategic priorities of the country.

## Contacts

For further information please contact the evaluation office at the following address: [evaluation@who.int](mailto:evaluation@who.int)

The full evaluation report is available here: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/country-office-evaluation-kyrgyzstan-report>