

**Committee of Senior Representatives (CSR)
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Reference	CSR 24/9.4/1
Title	New approaches to ensure that the relevant results from the Expert Groups' work are conveyed to the policy level
Submitted by	Strategy Working Group
Summary / Note	This document was originally submitted to the CSR 23 meeting, however, due to time constraints, the discussion was postponed.
Requested action	For discussion and decision

Discussion paper

Evaluation Team's and CSR's recommendation no. 40: "Develop new approaches to ensure that the relevant results and recommendations from the Expert Groups' work are conveyed to the policy level, both within NDPHS and nationally, and taken into account in policy development processes."

References: Oslo Declaration, NDPHS website, Norway's input document for SWG2 (SWG2014 2/3/1 – cf. Annex)

Definition of the problem – are these important issues?

The Committee of Senior Representatives (CSR) consists of senior-level representatives that are appointed by the NDPHS Partners. CSR serves as the main coordinating body of the NDPHS, ensuring that decisions and recommendations issued by the Partnership Annual Conference (PAC) are carried out. CSR members represent their country or organisation between the PAC meetings and they are the link between the expert/technical level and the political level.

- CSR members should be able to understand – at least to some extent – the technical issues discussed in the Expert Groups and Task Groups, be in regular contact with their national members in the Expert and Task Groups and – more importantly – inform and involve the political level on the outputs and work of the NDPHS.
- Are the CSR members of the partner countries in a position where they can easily contact political decision makers (ministers, permanent secretaries, department directors) and inform them about the new policy recommendations rising from the work done within NDPHS Expert groups and Task Groups?

The Expert Groups (EGs) and Task Groups (TGs) are "consisting of experts from interested Partners and Participants and other international experts, as appropriate. Under the guidance of the CSR, the EGs may have an advisory role and/or provide professional input to the preparation and implementation of joint activities carried out within the framework of the Partnership, including Work Programmes. The EGs groups may facilitate professional exchanges, increase co-ordination among Partners and Participants and monitor joint activities within their area of expertise. As given by the CSR, within its mandate an expert group will organise its own work." EGs are instrumental in achieving the main objective of the Partnership.

- EG and TG representatives are chosen in different ways in each country, but their main criteria is technical knowledge and expertise in the substance matter of the respective EG/TG. The partner country members may not be coming from the same organisation (ministries) as the CSR member and thus the communication between the EG/TG members and CSR member in each country may not be natural and frequent. The EGs and TGs should, however, provide solid expert advice to the CSR, the PAC and the partner countries. How can we make sure that this happens without limiting the autonomy of the EGs in organising their work?

How could we ensure the influence of the work of EGs/TGs in the policy processes in the partner countries?

Some suggestions, for discussion:

- Map out has the work done in NDPHS EGs and TGs had any influence on national level policies and decisions, not only regarding the policies and decisions on Ministries of Health/Social Affairs/ Labour and Social Policy but also the Ministries of Foreign Affairs / Cooperation.
- Map out what policy-related results and recommendations of EGs and TGs have induced discussions and decisions at NDPHS CSR and PAC.
- Map out the current mechanisms how CSR members and EGs/TGs communicate with each other in partner countries and organisations.
- Suggest a mechanism for regular meetings between CSR member and the national EG/TG members. Not only preparing for the CSR and PAC meetings but also as information sharing and informing the CSR member on important policy-relevant documents, assessments etc to take forward to policy level. At the same time different EG/TG members get to know each other – if not already happening?
- Suggest that CSR members report back to national EG/TG members on how they have reported or discussed the NDPHS related policy issues with the policy/decision makers. Is this too much to ask?
- Establish a mechanism for CSR members to discuss the EG/TG meeting reports with the national EG/TG representative immediately after EG/TG meetings – if regular meeting(s) with representatives from all EGs/TGs is(are) not covering those.
- Encourage informal information exchange on matters that the EGs/TGs are dealing with. How?

Oslo 13.03.2014

Development of the NDPHS Strategy 2020 – Norwegian input

The present paper is an input to the NDPHS strategy process. It discusses how to give relevance to the membership in the NDPHS for states and international government organisations (IGO) partners. The paper further reflects on the role and functions of the NDPHS constituent parts. We believe that awareness of what makes NDPHS unique and relevant for the partner countries and organisations, as well as a common understanding on how to best utilise our time and resources when engaging in the work of its different levels, is important in order to make the NDPHS an even better tool for achieving our goals. We hope that the paper can be seen as a positive contribution to the strategy development process.

1. How to give relevance to the NDPHS

The establishment of the Northern Dimension Partnership had two main driving forces. The first was that the new political climate after the fall of the Berlin wall needed to be envisaged also in the northern part of Europe to gain long term benefits to the region.

The second driving force was the need to address current common problems and challenges. These were either old problems that had struggled to be addressed during the cold war, like environmental issues, or new developments caused by the changes. That includes transport issues, culture cooperation and health and social issues.

In 2003 the NDPHS was established to address the latter within the framework of The Northern dimension. That meant to concentrate the co-operation activities to the countries around the Baltic Sea region, north West Russia and the Nordic countries. The Oslo declaration of 2003 drew up the priorities of issues to be addressed. Generally, those priorities of issues have been kept since.

1.1. Premises for priorities

Compared to the situation 15 years ago the need in itself, to make the cooperation in the north visible, is far less important than in was. When having a full review of the NDPHS strategy, it must be based on what the needs are for the participating parties. Therefore, priorities based primarily only on activities that can gain external financial support will not be enough to fulfil the partners own needs.

1.2. Concerns regarding the NDPHS current programme

Different concerns regarding the NDPHS, not necessarily shared by all the parties, have been raised during the discussions over the past four years. These can be grouped in the following categories:

- i) The quality of the work of the EGs. (fewer good projects than could be expected, weak participation from some member states)
- ii) No added value for the member states. (Too much parallel to the cooperation within other IGO, (EU, WHO etc)
- iii) The coordination of the work of the EG has very little focus on the technical issues (i.e. health and social issues) and the inter disciplinary coordination.
- iv) The governing level of the organisation (technical agencies subordinate to the ministries) is often not involved, or has often just limited involvement in the technical issues that have been given priority within NDPHS.
- v) As a result of the above mentioned weaknesses the decision making levels have seen fewer useable results than foreseen of the cooperation.

1.3. Positive elements with the NDPHS model:

- i) An optimal size of member states and partner organisations.
When criticizing the programme activities for being too parallel to other international bodies one is not taking into consideration that other international cooperative bodies are much larger and covering countries over a wider scale of differences than is the case with the NDPHS. The optimal size gives the member states themselves better opportunities to develop common priorities of issues to discuss, and gives the expert groups a more intimate, less formal format which is necessary to be creative and constructive.
- ii) Through this closer technical cooperation the NDPHS can play a role as provider of better contact and participation from all parties of the network inside larger intergovernmental bodies.
- iii) Some of the similarities of the northern area in lifestyle patterns and culture can motivate to closer technical cooperation in understanding and tackling challenges.

All this positive potentials can only be used if there is a good and representative participation at competent technical level in the cooperation. That can only be achieved if there is seen a potential for added value of the cooperation on technical level inside the NDPHS

A particular element to develop such understanding is to have a much more close and harmonised inter disciplinary cooperation , including cooperation between the different expert groups or expert reference groups (or what format one will chose).

And the choice of issues to be given priorities within the NDPHS must be taken by the political level, (of course as a result of dialogue with the technical expertise).

2. NDPHS – roles and functions

In the same way as the Partnership itself must be founded on the needs for the participating parties, so must the way we organise our work itself. The NDPHS should be organised in the best possible way with the aim of achieving the goals that we set for the collaboration. While gaining external financial support for projects or activities may enable us to solve some practical issues or problems, maximizing external financial support should not be a goal in itself.

2.1. The Expert groups

The main objective of the partnership, set in the Oslo Declaration, is: ”to assist the partners and participants in improving their capacity to set priorities in health and social well-being, as well as to enhance co-ordination of international activities within the Northern Dimension area.”

The EGs are instrumental in reaching the this objective, and the partner countries and organisations should bear it in mind when nominating their representatives to the groups.

The expert representatives

The experts chosen must have profound technical knowledge of the subject matter and at the same time be able to keep contact with their CSR-member and through them the political level in their country or organisation.

The groups will be measured on their ability to provide solid expert advice to the CSR, the PAC and the partner countries.

The countries and organisations should provide for sufficient time for the expert to tend to NDPHS matters, such as communication with the chair and ITA, the other experts and the CSR-members, also between the regular meetings.

The EG chair and co-chair

The success of the EGs and TGs is very much dependent on the chair and his/her idea of how to bring the work forward. It is up to the chair to have a vision and a plan for how to best utilize the combined expertise of the group in order to advance the work of the NDPHS within the existing framework. The co-chair should take part in the planning process. When nominating chairs and co-chairs, the countries and organisations are encouraged to look for candidates with a vision on how to take the work of the expert groups and task groups forward.

The ITA (International Technical Adviser)

As the term International Technical Adviser suggests, fulfilling the role of the ITA requires technical insight in the field of expertise as well as the ability to create and uphold the international network. The ITA answers to the chair of the EG, and also to the lead country which is his/her employer. He or she is also there to support the experts in their work during and between the regular meetings.

None of the present ITAs are fully employed to work with NDPHS issues. One should therefore be careful not to impose an increasing amount of administrative (secretarial) tasks on the ITAs. They must be given sufficient time for the activities that lie within their mandate.

The lead country

The lead country has taken special responsibility for the EG or TG and provides funding for the ITA. While the lead country has a responsibility as employer of the ITA and also normally holds the chairmanship of the group, it does not engage in the day-to-day running of the group. While the NDPHS needs the support of countries willing to take the lead of expert groups, the willingness by one or more countries or organisations to fund the ITA of an expert group should not be sufficient for the partnership to include the group in its structure. The decision on how to organise the partnership should continue to rest with the CSR.

Chairs and ITA-meetings

The Chairs and ITA meetings are a valuable forum for coordination between the expert groups. It is important that sufficient time at the meetings be allocated for technical issues. There may be a need to organise the meetings in a different manner in order to avoid too much of the meeting being taken up by administrative issues. We suggest that one EG or TG be responsible for compiling the draft agenda for each meeting through a circulation system.

2.2. The NDPHS Secretariat

Taken from the Oslo declaration in 2003, the "Partnership secretarial function will, when considered necessary by the CSR, be established in order to provide administrative and other support to the CSR. The secretariat will function under the direction of the CSR Chair. The secretariat will assist the CSR to prepare the Partnership Annual Conference and the meetings of the CSR. It could also be assigned to provide support to Partnership expert groups.

Furthermore, the secretariat could by the CSR be assigned tasks pertaining to project preparation and implementation, as well as the establishment and maintenance of databases required for enhanced co-ordination and co-operation.”

The description remains valid also for the years to come, and should always be kept in mind when considering assigning new tasks to the Secretariat As has been pointed out in both evaluations, there are only two full-time positions at the Secretariat. The Secretariat cannot rely on the EGs or TGs to take on administrative issues in order to overcome their own workload, as this does not lay within their mandate. The CSR should bear this in mind and be careful not to overburden the staff of the Secretariat for whom, after the conclusion of the agreement of the establishment of the NDPHS secretariat, the parties to the agreement jointly carry the responsibility as employer.

2.3. The PAC and the CSR

The PAC (Partnership Annual Conference)

The PAC gives the political guidance for the Partnership. It meets every second year on political level. The relatively small size of the partnership allows for discussions on health and related social issues, both formally at the meetings and also informally during the meetings. The representation at the past two PAC meetings where most countries have been represented by the minister or state secretary shows the interest in the issues among the partner countries. It is important that the countries and organisations continue to prioritize participation at high level to the PAC.

The CSR Chair and Co-chair

The role of the CSR Chair is to facilitate good solutions and reaching consensus. The position requires technical insight and the ability to take a broad overview as well as a high degree of political understanding. In the past, the position has been taken up by a deputy director general or above. In addition there has always been one or more staff members in the Ministry of health of the chair country devoted to the NDPHS work during the chairmanship. It is important that the chair countries continue to allocate sufficient human and financial resources to successfully carry out the work.

The CSR-members

As the name indicates, the CSR members are senior representatives. Their task is to represent their country or organisation between the PAC-meetings. They are the link between the expert/technical level and the political level. The CSR-members must be able to maintain strong links with both these levels, to involve the political level when relevant, and to maintain the network within their countries or organisations also between the meetings.

Meeting of the Parties (MP)

Meeting of the parties (or MP-meetings) is the new and very welcome addition to the type of meetings under the NDPHS. As the name indicates, it is the parties who have already signed the agreement on the establishment of the NDPHS secretariat that are present at these meetings. The agenda includes budgetary issues and questions related to personnel and running of the Partnership. The advantage of the meeting is that it is small in size and that topics can be discussed and further elaborated without taking up the time at the CSR-meeting. This again frees time from the CSR meetings that may be used for technical discussions.

The MP meeting should be organised on a regular basis in connection with every CSR-meetings.

Meetings of the CSR

The NDPHS is a forum for finding solutions that are positive for all the involved parties, and advance the health and social well-being for the population in the region as a whole. As mentioned in the introduction, the optimal size gives the member states themselves better opportunities to develop common priorities of issues to discuss, and gives a more intimate, less formal format which is necessary to be creative and constructive. The CSR-meetings are conducted in a friendly atmosphere with the aim of reaching decisions by consensus.

The CSR-meeting is the place where the EGs and TGs can present their work for the CSR-members. It is important that the message from the EGs and TGs are not too detailed, but focus on the results and highlight the issues that should be brought to the attention of the decision makers of the partner countries and organisations. Time should be allowed for technical discussions involving more than one EG or TG.

3. Concluding remarks

We hope that this paper can be seen as a positive contribution to the NDPHS strategy process. We look forward to the discussions in the Strategy Working Group and to continuing our participation in the collaboration with a better understanding of the relevance of the NDPHS for the partner countries and organisations, and how we best can work together in order that the NDPHS by 2020 continues to be a widely recognized network which produces added value for prioritized issues related to health and social well-being in the ND region.