

Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network

Annual General Meeting

Millennium Hilton Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

12 May 2016, 08:30-18:30



Meeting Summary

The 2016 APMEN Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held in Bangkok, Thailand, in conjunction with the first Asia Pacific Joint Malaria Week. Malaria Week aimed to coordinate meetings of various malaria platforms and stakeholders in the region, including The World Health Organization (WHO), the Global Fund Regional Artemisinin-resistance Initiative (RAI), the Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network (APMEN), private sector and civil society organization meetings, and the Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance (APLMA) Senior Officials Meeting.

The APMEN AGM drew 85 participants representing 12 of the 18 APMEN Partner Countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Viet Nam), as well as having four Observer Countries (Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Timor Leste) in attendance. In addition, 18 of APMEN's 37 Partner Institutions were represented, along with active participation from donors and other observers. The meeting was facilitated by Dr Jim Tulloch and meeting coordination was jointly supported by the APMEN and APLMA Secretariats. Sixteen volunteers, affiliated with the Network, co-facilitated the afternoon session.

The overarching objective of the AGM was to achieve consensus on the future role and strategic direction of APMEN, within the changing context of malaria elimination in the Asia Pacific. The agenda included a review of APMEN's past and present achievements and challenges (Sessions 1 & 2), and a prioritization activity to identify future focus areas for APMEN (Session 3). A Country Partner consultation was also held to assess the identified priority areas where APMEN might best support malaria programme managers in achieving their priority actions.

The key outcome of the AGM was achieving broad agreement on some specific areas of future focus for APMEN. During discussions about APMEN's future priority areas, participants identified the following points to be considered:

- **Clearly communicating** APMEN's future role and comparative advantage within the elimination architecture;
- **Tailoring APMEN efforts** to areas where there are needs that are unmet by other organizations (such as supporting translation of evidence into policy and practice);
- Ensuring APMEN's activities are of **immediate relevance** to improving national elimination efforts, and **adapted to different country needs**;
- Exploring **efficient ways of working** that fully utilize all forms of communication to facilitate collaboration;
- **Transparently tracking progress** on a **clearly defined set of priorities**, according to agreed timelines;
- Ensuring further **consultative development** of a revised APMEN strategic plan (including engagement with countries who were not able to attend the AGM).

The discussions and outcomes of each meeting session are described in more detail within the **Summary by Session** section, below.

Summary by Session

Meeting opening

Session speakers:

- **Dr Jetsumon Sattabongkot Prachumsri**, APMEN Advisory Board Deputy Chair and Partner Institution representative (Mahidol Vivax Research Centre, Thailand)
- **Dr Chong Chee Kheong**, APMEN Advisory Board Chair and Country Partner representative (Malaysia)
- **Dr Nafsiah Mboi**, APLMA Leaders' Envoy, Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance
- **Dr Rabindra Abeyasinghe**, Coordinator, Malaria, other Vectorborne and Parasitic Diseases Unit, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific

Following a welcome to Bangkok provided by Dr Jetsumon Sattabongkot Prachumsri, the speakers each described the important role APMEN has had, and will continue to have in achieving the 2030 goal of a malaria-free Asia Pacific. The importance of increased coordination and partnerships was also highlighted, as a means to potentially achieve gains beyond malaria elimination, including universal health care and poverty alleviation.

In particular, Dr Nafsiah Mboi, the APLMA Leaders' Envoy, discussed the critical role that malaria program staff play in malaria elimination, and the importance of community level action as "the final battle ground" where elimination will either be lost or won. Dr Abeyasinghe described how the malaria elimination landscape has transformed since the creation of APMEN, and reminded participants that success is contingent on coordinating efforts.

The meeting facilitator, Dr Jim Tulloch, summarised the opening remarks by encouraging participants to consider, from a critical perspective, all that APMEN has done as a way to examine which activities are relevant to the Network's future.

Session 1: The changing landscape of malaria elimination in the Asia Pacific

Session speakers:

- **Dr Mario Baquilod**, APMEN Country Partner representative, Philippines
- **Prof Gao Qi**, APMEN SRWG Chair
- **Prof Ric Price**, APMEN VxWG Chair
- **Dr Christina Rundi**, APMEN VcWG Chair

Each of the speakers reflected on the role APMEN has played in its first six years, and its growth from 10 Country Partners in 2009 to 18 in 2016. The achievements and broad activities of the Network, and its working groups, were highlighted including APMEN's success in developing strong linkages between Country Partners and the research community. In light of these presentations, important questions were raised around the future role and activities which APMEN is best placed to undertake. The need to assess key issues and address challenges and needs with a time-bound, action-oriented and evaluable approach was emphasized.

During the discussion, a few participants noted that it is important for APMEN to **take a dynamic and translational approach**, and to better communicate research to implementers and program managers. Some participants suggested that the partnerships created within APMEN between researchers and implementers made the Network well positioned to do this. Echoing this point, one participant noted there were two unique and standout strengths within APMEN: **translating research into policy and practice**, as well as its **composition and position to influence policy**. The importance of **ensuring that research was linked with country level needs** was also expressed.

Session 2: APMEN in the context of new regional commitments to elimination

Session speakers:

- **Ms Amanda Murphy**, APMEN Secretariat representative
- **Dr Ben Rolfe**, Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance
- **Dr Jetsumon Sattabongkot Prachumsri**, APMEN Advisory Board Deputy Chair

The speakers summarized the key focus areas of APMEN's role to date (including advocacy and leadership for elimination, building the evidence base, strengthening capacity within malaria control programs, and knowledge exchange), in comparison to other actors working in malaria elimination, and asked the question: "where to from here?".

It was acknowledged that APMEN created the platform for the elimination agenda in the Asia Pacific and generated the momentum leading to the establishment and partnership with APLMA. A potential vision of a future APMEN was presented, with APMEN providing an important link between political dialogue and programs, noting the important unmet need in the region for a mechanism to inform and support the operationalization of policies.

The audience's participation was then requested in suggesting priority roles APMEN could play in the region going forward. Suggestions from participants included:

- APMEN should **include a sub-regional focus in identifying shared challenges** – this is especially important for the challenge of border operations (e.g. surveillance, treatment, vector control);
- APMEN should support a **tailored approach to these specific challenges**, support linkages between relevant countries and experts to address these challenges;
- APMEN should focus its effort toward supporting well-defined priority activities with a time-bound, evaluable approach, to **improve measurement of the Network's impact** in addressing identified challenges;
- APMEN should facilitate mechanisms to **identify and resolve specific common agendas/concerns** (e.g. *P. knowlesi*) shared by some countries, and facilitate collaboration among these to overcome problems identified;
- APMEN should explore new, innovative and flexible ways to **facilitate timely communication between Network members**, beyond annual meetings.

Session 3: Future directions for the APMEN Network

Session speakers:

- **Dr Jim Tulloch**, APMEN AGM Facilitator
- **Dr Roly Gosling**, UCSF Global Health Group and SRWG Co-chair
- **Group work facilitators** (16 volunteers from the Network)

Meeting participants were divided into groups to discuss and prioritize future strategic roles for APMEN within the current Asia Pacific malaria elimination landscape. Small groups rotated through different stations to review and rate the importance of potential future areas of APMEN work such as: regional governance, political advocacy, resource mobilization, the evidence-to-policy-to-tools-to-action continuum, capacity building, and regulation. Facilitators reported back to the wider group on the key discussion points covered at their respective stations, as well as the results of the prioritization exercise. Areas of work that were noted as being important to APMEN's future strategic direction included:

- **information sharing on best practices;**
- **inter-country cooperation;** and
- **expanding the evidence base,** among others.

The exercise also revealed areas of work that participants felt were poorly-suited for APMEN, for example, improving regulatory frameworks was largely deemed to be outside of APMEN's scope.

During the group discussions, it was clear that participants felt that APMEN did have an important role to play in supporting malaria elimination in the region. It was felt that taking a more focused approach in the development of future objectives and activities will facilitate actionable and measurable results. The outcomes from the group exercise will inform the future strategic direction of APMEN.

Closed session: Country Partner Consultation

Chair of Session: Dr Chong Chee Kheong, APMEN Advisory Board Chair and Country Partner representative (Malaysia)

Co-Chair of Session: Dr Jetsumon Sattabongkot Prachumsri, APMEN Advisory Board Deputy Chair and Partner Institution representative (Mahidol Vivax Research Centre, Thailand)

This session aimed to facilitate a consultative and open discussion with APMEN Country Partner representatives on outcomes of the AGM, and identify important priority areas to take forward from the Country Partners' perspectives. The Country Partners were each invited to share their key concerns and suggestions regarding the role of APMEN in the future. Some of the feedback provided by the Country Partners included:

- A desire for APMEN to provide a **stronger supportive influence on malaria programme needs**, including assisting in interpretation of/adherence to national policy;
- The need for a **targeted and integrated approach** to seeking specific solutions faced by malaria control programmes – also taking the importance of other vector borne diseases into account;
- The need to **maintain sustainability of activities/funding for each country** to progress its elimination strategies, and for APMEN to broadly enable support to this, where possible;
- A desire for APMEN to identify and **share key challenges experienced by countries** (e.g. dealing with prevention of reintroduction, approaches to specific geographical/border challenges) to other countries in the region ahead of time so that countries can plan appropriately as they reach that stage;
- Concern that while a lot research had been undertaken, there was a **lack of sharing and ensuring understanding of research** with those who need to be aware of it. APMEN could assist by facilitating easier access to research for malaria programmes, so that they can advocate for policy change.

Key suggestions from the Country Partners were to:

- **Identify a clear role for APMEN** in relation to its partners, and in alignment with the needs/interests of donors;
- **Engage with individual countries' situations/needs**, and identify specific focus areas that APMEN can help progress;
- **Make APMEN more dynamic, timely and effective in its communication** mechanisms;
- Ensure APMEN is **focused on understanding the challenges on the ground**;
- Engage new institutions and countries in APMEN's work to **allow exposure to new opportunities and knowledge**.

Final comments by participants emphasized that the future of APMEN depends on funding, and therefore, it is important to define the potential impact and role of APMEN going forward. Drawing upon the input received to date, the Secretariat confirmed it would take the following next steps during the coming months:

1. Continue consultation with, and provide of updates to, the Network in driving the future direction and resources of APMEN;
2. Revise the APMEN strategic plan, and continue to seek donor funding; and
3. Establish the new, shared APMEN-APLMA Secretariat office in Singapore, and define the most effective ways that APMEN can work together with APLMA and partners.