Summary report on the

Subregional meeting on laboratory capacities as per the requirements of the International Health Regulations (2005)

Marrakesh, Morocco
5–6 July 2012
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1. Introduction

The International Health Regulations (2005), or IHR, are legally binding on all States Parties and impact on governmental functions and responsibilities across many ministries, sectors and governmental levels. Laboratory capacity is one of the eight core capacities identified by IHR and should be involved in all phases of alert and response systems including detection, investigation and response. Laboratories of different sectors should be able to provide reliable and timely laboratory identification of infections and other hazards that may cause public health events of international concerns.

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Morocco organized a meeting from 5 to 6 July 2012 in Marrakesh, Morocco, for national IHR focal points and laboratory representatives from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The aim of the meeting was to draw attention to the role of laboratories from different sectors in implementing IHR. The key objectives were to:

- identify the main gaps in laboratory capacities and the appropriate mechanisms and solutions to address these gaps;
- propose a framework to establish a link between national IHR focal points and laboratories;
- highlight the importance of establishing laboratory quality management systems;
- draw the attention to importance of networking and collaboration with other sectors in building laboratory capacities.
2. **Summary of discussions**

The meeting was divided into seven sessions, each of which included a presentation followed by a group work session and group presentation. Subjects discussed in the sessions included: global and regional situation for laboratory capacities under IHR; collaboration between IHR national focal point and laboratory; establishing laboratory quality management systems; role of global, regional and national networking in strengthening laboratories; collaboration with other sectors in building laboratory capacities; and establishing effective data sharing and information systems.

The delegates representing their countries in this workshop discussed and shared ideas and challenges in strengthening laboratory capacities to implement IHR. Participants noted the importance of having a complete and effective quality management system in each laboratory, which is necessary to guarantee timely and reliable results. Delegates discussed and agreed on the importance of strengthening laboratory capacities and empowering its role in IHR committees. They also stressed the importance of collaboration between laboratories and other sectors to ensure proper implementation of IHR.

3. **Recommendations**

*To Member States*

1. Strengthen and regulate intrasectoral and intersectoral coordination for proper implementation of IHR.
2. Strengthen the medical engineering system to ensure preventive maintenance for all laboratory equipment.

3. Ensure that policies, regulations, mechanisms and allocated budget for specimen transportation, inside and outside the country, are in place.

4. Establish a strong information and communication system to ensure continuous reporting and sharing of data and information in a timely manner to the other concerned sectors. This system should also enable the central public health laboratory to receive results and data from other laboratories within the country.

5. Join and share in all available networking activities through proper regulations and mechanisms to improve laboratory capacity and ensure having designated regional reference laboratories or collaborating centres to refer specimens for confirmation or more advanced investigations if needed.

6. Monitor and improve the capacity of intermediate and basic level laboratories in the country through providing continuous training and proficiency panels for different diagnostic tests.

7. Ensure the effective implementation of the laboratory component in the plan for extension.

8. Use all available resources for different laboratories specialties to support the role of the laboratory in IHR implementation.

To WHO

9. Map and share the existing laboratory capacities in each country and at regional level.

10. Provide technical support as requested with a focus on areas lacking in the systems, e.g. quality management, bio-risk management, data management systems and networking.

11. Re-establish the regional medical equipment maintenance training programme.
12. Advocate for strengthening the laboratory role in IHR implementation.
13. Provide laboratory staff with advocacy sessions and training in IHR requirements and implementation.