The Towards A Safer World Network of Pandemic Preparedness Practitioners:

Taking Stock of Achievements: Charting Future Directions

Workshop held at the Geneva International Conference Centre on 20 May 2013

Executive Summary of the Event Report[1]

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[1] Prepared by the UN System Influenza Coordination System Office (UNSIC), June 2013

Executive Summary

1   The "Towards a Safer World" network: the network exists to ensure the ready availability of up-to-date expertise in "Whole of Society" Pandemic Preparedness. It consists of more than 200 experienced practitioners from a broad range of professional disciplines who are working, or have worked, within national Governments, regional and international organizations, the military, businesses, and civil society organizations.

2   History of the Network: The network was launched after the effectiveness of whole of society pandemic preparedness efforts was reviewed in 2010 and then examined at an international meeting of practitioners in September 2011. The meeting concluded that though this approach to preparedness has had an extraordinary impact on preparedness in many diverse settings, its potential will not be maintained within different Governments, organizations and institutions as they are reducing the priority they give to pandemic preparedness – not least because of continuous pressures on budgets for such activities.

3   Purpose of the network: The network enables experienced practitioners to help maintaining the capacity for pandemic preparedness by keeping their expertise and skills up to date, sharing experiences, communicating them widely, mainstreaming them within their institutions, and reaching out to engage others.   Members of the network are available to be mobilized (and to mobilize others) in the event that there is an increased threat of a severe disease pandemic or similar unpredictable a high impact cross-border disaster increases.

4   Management of the Network: The network is managed by the office of the United Nations System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC) in Geneva, Switzerland, in close cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, the World Organization for Animal Health (OiE) and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Exchanges of experience, tools and practices among members is made possible through (a) the TASW website, (b) the periodic TASW newsletter, (c) a regularly updated roster of expert practitioners, and (d) participation in regional and global preparedness forums.

5   Stocktaking workshop May 20th 2013: 47 members of the network met for a day long stocktaking workshop in Geneva, at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, on May 20th 2013. They examined what has been achieved since 2011 and they considered how best to strengthen the capacity and contribution of the members. The workshop also led to proposals for ways in which pandemics and other health threats can best be incorporated in the international agenda for disaster risk reduction (the Hyogo Framework for Action, which will be revised in 2015).

Impact areas

6   Impact area 1: Preparing for a unpredictable threats that cross borders and affect the safety of all people: The whole of society pandemic preparedness skills of network members makes them valuable contributors to preparations for and responses to a broad range of unpredictable threats. They are especially useful when addressing threats that have the potential to cross borders – affecting the safety and well-being of all people, and the economic and social systems on which they depend.

7   Impact area 2: Preparing for worst case scenarios, on a basis of trust and mutual respect: Network members are most effective when they concentrate on worst-case scenarios, recognizing the interdependency between sectors and focusing on whole-of-society actions needed to reinforce essential services so that they are much more resilient. They have encouraged open information sharing between network members and others with whom they have established relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Formal partnerships can be helpful provided they are underpinned by shared principles and trust: if not, they tend to be ineffective or just function as spaces where information sharing is incomplete.

8   Impact area 3: Bridging gaps in information and differences in approach: Members of the Network have been most effective when they have helped bridge the information gaps and divergences in approach that can develop between military and civilian services, different departments of government, the public sector and businesses, different organizations within civil society, and agencies responsible for humanitarian or development assistance. Regional intergovernmental organizations, such as the East African Community or ASEAN, have played key roles in encouraging communication between countries and promoting synergy among different groups of actors engaged in preparing for pandemics and other unpredictable cross-border threats. In high-risk countries for avian influenza and emergence of zoonotic diseases, efforts have been made by all partners to develop a systematic One Health approach to prepare for and respond to these threats. Emphasis was put on whole of society and multisectoral collaboration for all critical sectors that might be affected by the threats or that can help to mitigate their impact. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Tourism Organization (UN WTO) promote multisectoral collaboration to improve preparedness planning in the aviation sector based on their extensive experience preparing for and responding to pandemic influenza. In this, they bring together different stakeholders within each public and private sectors, to good effect.

Future needs

9   Future needs 1: Further development of network members' skills: Members of the network wish to continue sharing experiences and increasing their expertise, so they are better able to contribute to preparedness capacity, negotiate agreements and joint actions among diverse actors, and demonstrate what is being achieved through their efforts. Members will seek regular face-to-face or electronic meetings and continue sharing information through newsletter and the website. They will also seek to link with other disaster risk reduction and pandemic preparedness groups at national, regional and global levels. They will draw on existing tools that support synergized preparedness for reducing the risks posed by extreme and unpredictable threats (including frameworks and plans of

action for contingency and business continuity planning, simulation exercises and inventories of expertise and capabilities).   They will seek ways to measure gaps in preparedness and to establish the impact of the strategies and actions they promote.

10   Future needs 2: Intensify advocacy for a basic minimum level of resources to prepare for pandemics and other extreme unpredictable global threats. There are major gaps in preparedness that have widened in recent years as budgets have tightened. Efforts are being made to increase capacity and resilience, and minimize gaps, through joint working within existing preparedness platforms. However, the gaps will become more serious over time if the level of financial and human resources at all levels is pared down much further than they are now.   The network will encourage advocacy around the economic impact of emerging extreme threats, definitions of pandemic-resilient essential services, and the compilation of evidence on optimal strategies and tactics for ensuring resilience.   The network will also identify sources for technical support at national and regional levels and encourage the stress testing of capacities for leading both preparedness and response to such threats.

Looking ahead

11   Looking ahead: the revised Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA2): One ultimate objective of disaster risk reduction is to protect the well-being of people and the resilience of the systems on which they depend. Hence health outcomes will be an element of many plans for disaster risk reduction – and are expected to feature in HFA2. Direct influences on human health – such as disease outbreaks and pandemics, leaks of toxic agents or unsafe food – are increasingly being identified as potential threats. This is leading to increased alignment of the HFA with the processes for Implementation of the International Health Regulations. The TASW network is set to play a key role in supporting preparation for and implementation of HFA2 – particularly priority action 4 (reducing risks). TASW members can support translation of the principles of global instruments (IHR and HFA) at the country level into key actions that national authorities can pursue to reduce risk. Members of the TASW will also be involved in the process leading to the development of HFA2 through national dialogues, regional platforms and the global platform of the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015. In this, they will seek to sustain and streamline pandemic preparedness and incorporate pandemic preparedness concepts of whole of society and mutlisectroal approaches into the HFA2.

12   Looking ahead: Follow up to this workshop: In August 2013 UNSIC will share a proposed plan of action for, and expected deliverables of, the TASW network with network members and potential funders. A review of progress will be held before September 2014.