



APEIR Strategic Plan, 2010-2013: Building Strong Social Capital against EIDs

Final version, January 2010

Background and Current Status of APEIR

In 2005, the Asian Partnership on Avian Influenza Research (APAIR) was initiated, with assistance from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to promote regional research collaboration on avian flu (H5N1). Subsequently in 2009, the network was renamed as the Asian Partnership on Emerging Infectious Disease Research (APEIR) in order to examine a wider range of emerging infectious diseases (EIDs), including the pandemic swine flu (H1N1) outbreak. For more information, please visit www.apeiresearch.net.

APEIR is a unique trust-based regional network comprising researchers, officials and practitioners from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Two representatives from each country as well as from IDRC form the Partnership Steering Committee, which provides overall guidance, coordination and supervision. A small regional Coordinating Office, based at the Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI) in Nonthaburi, Thailand, serves as the main communication hub among partners, and coordinates and monitors the work of national and regional research teams. Country Focal Persons have been designated to communicate and work closely with the Steering Committee and Coordinating Office.

APEIR work is underpinned by principles of **ecohealth**, which addresses EIDs as a development problem, rather than a medical one. As a holistic systems-based approach that places human health and wellbeing in the context of environmental, social and economic causes and impacts, ecohealth requires multidisciplinary research teams and involves all relevant stakeholders.

More than 30 partner institutions representing a range of expertise and sectors are currently participating in **APEIR research projects** on: wild migratory birds, socio-economic impact, backyard poultry, policy analysis, and control measures. The 5th APEIR Regional Meeting was held in January 2010 to share, update and discuss findings from the five APEIR studies.

A great deal has been achieved in getting APEIR in place, but the work has only just begun. During the Steering Committee meeting held in May 2009 in HCMC, Vietnam, the process for **articulating the APEIR strategic plan, 2010-2013**, was launched. This process culminated in a strategic planning workshop, held during August 2009 at HSRI, and the crafting of this plan, which was endorsed in January 2010 by the APEIR Steering Committee in Kunming, China. Implementing this strategic plan will help ensure that APEIR fulfills its promise as a catalytic leader, broker and doer within the Asian EID research community.

Scanning the Environment: SWOT Analysis

An analysis of the internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) environment within which APEIR operates revealed the following major points:

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + <u>Nature of network</u>: trust-based, informal, flexible, bottom-up, multi-country, multi-disciplinary, based on regional priorities, regionally led and implemented, researchers and government officials working at the research-policy interface, independent + <u>Performance of arrangements and people</u>: Steering Committee, Chairs, Coordinating Office, project leaders, HSRI, IDRC all have contributed well to success + <u>Concepts and approaches</u>: Ecohealth concepts and cross-country approaches are relevant and underpin partnership 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + <u>Expanding partnerships</u>: Ample opportunities with international donors, national governments, regional and international organizations, other related networks and partners; amplified by H1N1 situation + <u>Enhanced credibility</u>: recognition of APEIR by ASEAN+3 Health Ministers Special Meeting on H1N1 (May 2009, Bangkok)
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Communications</u>: both internal and external processes and products – <u>Capacity</u>: various aspects need improvement – <u>Funding</u>: donor base and fundraising capability limited – <u>Country-level networking</u>: sharing among projects and partners limited (except in Thailand) – <u>Lack of performance of current arrangements</u>: weak follow-up between meetings, slow response to opportunities, limited integration among country projects, limited Steering Committee role in research – <u>Policy influence</u>: limited impact to date 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Funding uncertainties</u>: shifting donor priorities, fragile single-donor support base, global economic downturn, more interest in well-known researchers and networks – <u>Government dynamics</u>: changing government policies and personnel – <u>Crowded field</u>: many competitors emerging as EID field grows and attracts more interest

Understanding APEIR: Values and Niche

The key core **values** and norms that characterize APEIR and its members may be expressed as:

- Partnership based on **trust** among members;
- **Openness** to new partners and ideas;
- Shared concern for **poverty reduction**, and focus on poor, marginalized and vulnerable groups; and
- **Regionally owned and led** initiative.

In terms of APEIR's **niche** and future role vis-à-vis EIDs in Asia, the value-adding qualities of the partnership are viewed as the following:

- Belief in and application of **ecohealth** principles and approaches to EIDs;
- Strong **research-policy interface** and **advocacy** role, with emphasis on **system** and **policy** research;
- **Multi-country, multi-disciplinary** and **multi-sectoral** approach; and
- Membership is **professionally based**, but **linked to institutions**.

APEIR's Vision, Mission and Desired Results

In visualizing where APEIR would like to be by 2013, these main strategic elements emerged:

Vision: To be the leading knowledge and research network in Asia for emerging infectious diseases.

Mission: To develop a strong regional partnership in Asia that generates multi-disciplinary collaborative research on emerging infectious diseases based on ecohealth concepts, and which facilitates communication and knowledge sharing among countries to reduce the threat of EIDs and the burden on these countries, especially on poor and marginalized groups in the region.

Desired Results (by 2013):

1. APEIR is recognized by peers as a "market leader" on EIDs.
2. Value of APEIR is recognized by donors and research partners, and resources are provided for useful services and products generated.
3. APEIR is more self-reliant in resource mobilization and **diversifying its donor base.**
4. Research results produced by APEIR are used, applied and adapted by a wide range of partners and stakeholders.
5. APEIR has expanded its partnership into new Southeast Asian and South Asian countries (e.g., Lao PDR, Myanmar and Bangladesh) because fighting EIDs needs a wider regional coordination and collaboration.

Objectives and Activity Areas

To progress towards the stated vision, mission and desired results by 2013, the next phase of APEIR work commencing in 2010 will focus on three objectives, which are not separate or distinct, but are closely interlinked with each other:

1. **Knowledge generation and management:** Support and share collaborative multi-disciplinary research on EIDs that transforms 'tacit' knowledge into 'explicit' knowledge through policy briefs and other products.
2. **Capacity building:** Strengthen the capacity of multi-disciplinary researchers, institutions and trust-based networks – within and among member countries.
3. **Social and policy advocacy.** Use strong collective social capital to advocate for appropriate social and policy responses, based on empirical evidence from research and practice.

Major activity areas to be supported under each objective include the following:

Knowledge	Capacity Building	Advocacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undertake multi-disciplinary research on priority topics and issues that address the most pressing problems regarding EIDs in the region, as well as contribute to the APEIR vision and mission ▪ Coordinate and support APEIR project teams to be highly effective research groups that have regional standing and can successfully compete for EID research funding ▪ Establish a monitoring program to track progress of research projects for communicating to Steering Committee, donors and the partnership as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organize relevant training courses for researchers (e.g., ecohealth approaches, proposal/article writing, advanced data analysis methods) ▪ Carry out exchanges of research fellows and study visits among researchers and policy makers engaged in multi-country collaborative projects ▪ Strengthen APEIR country networks through periodic meetings and other interactions among researchers and key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document APEIR multi-country research results for use in policy advocacy (e.g., policy briefs, publications, reports, conference papers, frequent website postings) ▪ Support researchers to publish results in peer-review journals, and to attend international, regional and national workshops/seminars to share policy-relevant research findings ▪ Collaborate with other networks and organizations in research, advocacy and dissemination activities and events to broaden reach and impact

Governance and Coordination of the Partnership

APEIR will continue to be governed by a Steering Committee, which includes representatives of key partner countries and donors and provides general oversight and direction for the network.

The partnership will work to refine and optimize its organizational structure – Steering Committee, Coordinating Office, Country Focal Persons – to better align with and support the functions articulated in this strategic plan.

Guidelines will be provided to members and partners on ‘branding’ issues vis-à-vis what it means to be part of an APEIR research team (responsibilities as well as benefits).

Based on experience to date, as well as the SWOT analysis, the terms of reference for the main APEIR governing and organizational entities are being revised to clarify roles and responsibilities, delegation of authority, and decision-making processes, including the following considerations:

Steering Committee	Coordinating Office	Country Focal Persons
<p>Clarify roles and responsibilities of SC chair and members with regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting collaboration and networking within their respective countries ▪ Ensuring concrete follow-up actions ▪ Providing feedback to research teams ▪ Assigning SC members to monitor certain research topics, based on their respective areas of expertise ▪ Developing new ideas ▪ Proactively mobilizing resources and raising funds ▪ Acting as champions of EID research in region 	<p>Strengthen capacity and functions of Coordinating Office by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing M&E system to track research progress, outcomes and impacts ▪ Identifying and managing consultants for specific tasks ▪ Empowering coordinator to make most decisions related to APEIR daily operations, and clarifying relationship to research teams ▪ Coordinating process to synthesis and communicate research findings ▪ Assuming a greater role in resource mobilization 	<p>Take on more proactive role to strengthen country networks by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working more closely with SC members in their respective countries ▪ Ensuring there are resources and commitment to organize national APEIR meetings (e.g., HSRI already organized 14 Thai APEIR network meetings) ▪ Liaising more closely with Coordinating Office on matters such as funding needed for country network meetings and monitoring of research projects

Communications

APEIR is developing a communications strategy and products, with some support from the IDRC-Singapore partnerships and communications team. Key elements of this ongoing process include:

- Revising the ToR of Coordinating Office to strengthen internal and external communications, with possible assistance from volunteers/interns;
- Producing an APEIR communications kit, including: brochure, policy briefs, syntheses of research findings, and 'stories' from the research teams;
- Documenting and communicating a track record of APEIR achievements, products, and emerging outcomes and impacts;
- Providing guidelines to members and partners on branding issues: use of APEIR logo, PowerPoint templates for presentations, etc.; and
- Ensuring that six-month progress reports submitted to IDRC by research teams are shared and used more widely.

Resource Mobilization and Partnership Development

During the first years of its existence, the overwhelming majority of funds for APEIR operations came from IDRC, which was determined thorough an annual consideration. HSRI has also provided significant in-kind contributions in terms of office space for the APEIR Coordinating Office, coordination and communication support, as well as efforts to organize and convene Steering Committee, regional workshops and Thai APEIR Network meetings.

For this strategic plan cycle, 2010-2013, APEIR will strive to diversify its funding base as well as seek more contributions from member countries and institutions. Likely sources of funds for the coming period will come from:

- IDRC for supporting the Coordinating Office and its functions;
- Formalized partnerships of APEIR members for competing on EID research grants and funding (with a portion of these funds given to APEIR coordination);
- Member countries and institutions for country network meetings and related functions; and
- Other donors and partners with the mandate and resources for supporting or co-funding EID research and capacity building activities in the region.

APEIR is developing and carrying out a resource mobilization plan, with support from the IDRC Partnership Fund, which may be tapped to assist with EID donor mapping and other resource mobilizations tasks.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The terms of reference for the Coordinating Office will be revised to include key M&E functions that will gauge the progress being made toward attaining the APEIR objectives and desired results. Key indicators for measuring this progress will be developed. Consultants may be engaged by the Coordinating Office for certain M&E tasks.

Research monitoring and evaluation will be carried out by the country coordinator leading each research topic or study. It is also expected that, based on their respective areas of expertise, Steering Committee members will be assigned to monitor certain research work.

A self-reflection exercise among APEIR members was recently conducted to capture the achievements, social capital and major lessons gained thus far. A consultant was engaged to facilitate this exercise, which featured interactions with many APEIR colleagues. During the 5th APEIR Regional Meeting in Kunming, the self-reflection findings were shared, discussed and refined. Suggestions for developing an APEIR M&E mechanism include the future use of: self-reflection exercises; SWOT analyses; Outcome Mapping; and Network Functions Approach.