In a country where around three quarters of the population lives under US$2 per day, financial hardship is one of the key reasons why Somalis do not access or seek health services. Somalia also falls far below the minimum global expectation of doctor/patient ratio. Currently, there are only four doctors, nurses or midwives for every 10,000 people in Somalia. In addition, one out of every 12 women dies due to causes related to pregnancy, and 1 out of every 7 Somali children dies under the age of 5.

WHO is working with the Somali Government and partners to change this situation. Together, they convened a meeting on 8 November in Mogadishu to develop a roadmap to attain universal health coverage (UHC) in Somalia to ensure that everyone, everywhere can access essential, quality health services, without facing financial hardship.

Led by the Somali Ministry of Health, this meeting saw senior technical government staff and United Nations (UN) agencies discuss key issues related to Somalia’s health sector in an effort to advance UHC in the country. The development of the roadmap began with government representatives, UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations and donors conducting an in-depth review of the Somali health situation at a seminar held in Nairobi in April 2018. Participants at this seminar explored ways to localize the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 – good health and well-being – in the Somali context, compared the products delivered by the Somali essential package of health services, and discussed global best practices contained in “Disease Control Priorities” (third edition).
Reiterating WHO’s commitment towards ensuring equitable health care for all in Somalia, WHO Somalia Representative, Dr Ghulam Popal stated, “WHO is dedicated to changing the rhetoric in Somalia with support from our partners. We are committed to support Somalia to make progress in providing essential services to all individuals and communities in need, while ensuring they do not suffer financial hardship.”

Currently, WHO is working with the Ministry of Health, with substantive support from the Government of Japan, to conduct a series of consultations with Somali stakeholders to develop a common understanding of the roadmap to attaining UHC, and to ensure the plan is realistic, comprehensive, reaches out to a wide range of beneficiaries, complements health-related SDGs, and considers national health strategic priorities.

The Director-General for the Somali Ministry of Health, Dr Abdullahi Hashi, outlined the importance of involving different stakeholders to develop an effective roadmap on UHC. “Reactivating health sector coordination in Somalia will be important for us to have a more effective response towards attaining UHC,” Hashi said, adding that the plan should set realistic baselines and targets, adopt cost-effective interventions, and develop a joint nexus with the humanitarian work in the country.

At the Mogadishu meeting, partners explored options for health financing and health governance reforms, while emphasizing the importance of delivery of essential services through both development and humanitarian approaches.

Following the in-country consultations, WHO and the Ministry of Health will conduct a workshop in Nairobi to finalize the UHC roadmap, with support from the Government of Japan.

Somali stakeholders acknowledge the role of the Somali Ministry of Health and WHO in providing a platform for setting common strategic directions in Somalia’s weak health sector. They reiterated the importance of having similar discussions and regular joint reviews around health in Somalia to ensure the country’s progress in attaining development goals.

For additional information on universal health coverage in Somalia, kindly contact:
Dr Humayun Rizwan

WHO Somalia

Medical Officer, Health Systems Strengthening

Email: rizwanh@who.int

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