



Note for the Media

Health Sector Development: Fostering partnerships for Health System Strengthening in Somalia

WHO and partners identify key priorities and immediate actions in collaboration with Somali health authorities to strengthen health system.

Nairobi | 28 June 2010 -- In a bid to revitalize war-ravaged Somalia's health system, the World Health Organization, UN partners, donor governments and NGOs undertook a mission to the country this month that kick-started a national dialogue to improve healthcare for Somalis.

"To address ill health, there must be a multi-sectoral approach to strengthening community-based initiatives as well as long-term investment in public health," said Dr Marthe Everard, WHO's Representative to Somalia. "The mission succeeded in bringing together all parties involved in health to plan how to help the country shift from focusing solely on delivering healthcare in the context of a humanitarian emergency to, instead, developing a more sustainable health system that can meet the needs of its population."

Two decades of conflict has devastated Somalia's health system, making it unable to provide for the health needs of the country's people, many of whom are afflicted by communicable disease and malnutrition. Maternal and child mortality rates are among the world's highest and thousands of people have been wounded and killed by incessant violence.

The mission occurred 30 May-9 June and included high-level representatives from WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank, USAID, the UK DFID, Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), European Union, Italian Cooperation, and national and international NGOs.

Its goal was to help Somalia develop a health system that can deliver universal access to healthcare, especially for vulnerable groups, and work towards achieving health-related Millennium Development Goals, especially maternal and child health. The mission brought together all national and international healthcare providers to plan how to strengthen the institutional capacity of health ministries and advocate for the integration of disease control programmes, many of which now are independent of each other.

"We are fully committed to this cause and building the capacity of health authorities shall be welcomed as a long-term investment in health of the people," said Mr. Ahmed Hassan Ali, Minister of Health and Labor of Somaliland.

With the collapse of the health system, WHO and Health Cluster partners have had to take on various vital public health functions usually carried out by the government, including immunization, disease outbreak monitoring and control and training of health staff. Public health services are severely limited and fragmented, and rely heavily on international partners and NGOs. Health services are hampered by a low number of qualified health personnel, poor infrastructure and an insufficient number of functioning public health facilities. An unregulated but thriving public sector dominates health service delivery.

The mission visited Somali zones and met with various government ministries, including health, and partners to discuss public health needs. Field visits were conducted to public, private and NGO health facilities and training institutions in the country's north.

"This is a good beginning and we want to plan and build together our health system," said the Minister of Health of Puntland, Dr. Warsame.

Immediate key actions of the mission included:

- Reviewing zonal health policies and plans;
- Implementing capacity building programmes for health authorities;
- Developing training packages for health workers;
- Streamlining the health information system so it can support evidence-based decision-making, mapping and rehabilitation of health facilities;
- Conducting a health expenditure review.

Partnership is a vital element for health sector development and strengthening of health systems to make them sustainable will improve the health status of the Somali population. WHO and partners will work closely and seek support for health systems strengthening in Somalia to improve various areas, including governance and leadership, human resources for health and service delivery.

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