



# COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

and partnership for health development and poverty reduction in urban settings

**ISSUES:** The poor health conditions associated with lack of development and poverty reduce productivity and worsen other aspects of life. Holistic development, however, improves health which further enhances levels of development. Poverty remains one of the main causes of ill health because poor people are less likely to have access to good quality health care services, proper education, safe water, sanitation and other basic needs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1.2 billion people in the world live in extreme poverty. Those people are five times more likely to die before reaching the age of 5 years, and two and half times more likely to die between the ages of 15 and 59 years, compared to those living in higher income groups. Moreover, the gap between the rich and poor is growing, with serious implications for health. A less recognized reality is that improved health status can alleviate vulnerability and offer a route out of poverty. Indeed, healthy children are better able to learn, while healthy adults are more able to work and care for their families.

**SOLUTIONS:** The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has developed a practitioner model of community empowerment interventions that is a self-sustained, people-oriented strategy. The community-based initiatives programme embodies the WHO definition of health and aims "to improve health in poor populations through action on social determinants". Experience across the Region shows that ownership by, and involvement of, the community in the local development processes brought significant positive changes

in local socioeconomic indicators. Women in particular, if empowered and proactive in society, can bring about real change in society.

**ACTIONS DURING 2010:** The healthy city programme, one of the components of community-based initiatives, aims at improving the health status of the urban population, especially in urban slums, emphasizing the upgrading of environmental health services, health and living conditions. Its objectives also include increasing awareness of health and environmental issues, ensuring political mobilization and community participation and increasing the capacity of the municipal government to manage urban problems using a participatory community-based approach. During 2010, it is expected that more cities of the Region will join to the healthy city programme network, enhancing health and social indicators in urban settings and targeting major problems prioritized by the citizens.

**THE WAY FORWARD:** World Health Day 2010 is an opportunity to galvanize various government line departments under the leadership of mayors to work together to mobilize local communities and involve them in the development process at grass-roots level. WHO will continue to support countries in the development of a sustainable mechanism for community empowerment and intersectoral action for health that is matched with their own local infrastructure, rules and regulations. This will eventually improve the quality of life of all people, particularly the poor and most vulnerable groups of the community.



World Health Day 2010  
Urbanization and Health



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