

Statement on the First Regional Forum for Strengthening Health Systems for UHC and SDGs

The technical leaders of Ministries of Health, representatives of Development Partners including members of the UN System, representatives of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Donors, NGOs and civil society, and the, attended the First Regional Forum on Strengthening Health Systems for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) with the theme “Healthy Systems, Healthy People: Making universal health coverage (UHC) work for Africa”. The Forum, organized by the WHO Regional Office for Africa, took place in Windhoek, Namibia on 12-13 December 2016 and was aimed at gaining and sustaining efforts to strengthen country health systems to achieve UHC and the SDGs;

In September 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the SDGs, of which Goal 3 addresses health, underpinned by a target on UHC. The health goal, among others, addresses the unfinished Millennium Development Goals (MDG) agenda as well as incorporates emerging issues such as non-communicable diseases, injury prevention and environmental health;

Attaining the SDGs will require effective health systems in countries, with services that are designed and distributed towards achieving UHC. This calls for intersectoral action, necessitating strong partnership to ensure health in all policies and address the social determinants of health in line with various global and regional reports and declarations¹;

For the SDGs to be achieved, efficient generation and use of domestic resources will be critical with better prioritization and sequencing of investments for the best results. Indeed, investments in health systems should be holistic and have a long term sustainability perspective;

To achieve UHC and SDG 3, there is a need for effective, well thought-out health sector strategies and plans that focus on achieving service delivery outcomes that reach all the people at all stages of the life course including the most vulnerable; and has interventions that reflect country and sub-national situations and contexts;

UHC should build and ensure access to all the services needed to achieve good health (promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, addressing the major health determinants), security and financial protection that prevents ill health leading to poverty and contributes to the overall economic and social development progress of each country;

Focusing on districts, peripheral and community-based health services, including deprived urban communities and mobile communities is core for the success in obtaining universal health coverage and ensuring resilience needed for security against devastating outbreaks and disasters;

Given the results achieved with the MDGs, and in order to avoid shifting morbidity from one disease or program to another through vertical financing, there is need for strong health system base that shall support all priority interventions;

A health systems strengthening “Actions Framework” has been proposed by the forum to assist countries to lay foundations for good health systems;

Efforts shall be made to keep track of the progress made and to share experiences amongst countries. Peer review and other monitoring elements including the use of score cards will be important to assess key inputs and results.

¹ the report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008); the World Health Report 2008; the Ouagadougou Declaration on Primary Health Care and Health Systems in Africa (2008); and the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health (2011);

Improved data with better knowledge generation and utilization will be essential tools to inform policies and practices;

To ensure better harmonization and alignment of efforts, there will be a need to ensure that programs, services and related health system functions receive strong national leadership and partnerships aligned with the national priorities, policies, and strategies in an integrated and holistic manner;

The Forum appreciates the efforts made by the WHO Regional Office for Africa to organize the Forum and foster sharing of experiences and an African approach to building sustained, resilient and robust health systems;

In line with earlier commitments by Heads of State, during the adoption of the SDGs, and in order to strengthen health systems to achieve Universal Health Coverage and the SDGs:

(1) The Member States are encouraged to:

- a. Undertake health systems assessments to understand the current situation and define the strategic directions and essential interventions towards strengthened health systems including provision for health security and effective management of health emergencies;
- b. to build political commitment for strengthening their health systems and services and deploy them in ways that encourage access across geographical, socio-cultural and financial barriers, taking care of the vulnerable and ensuring nobody is left behind with their health rights;
- c. Prioritize the District and community Health Systems as the core driver of the National Health System by availing adequate resources, increasing decision space and building their leadership and management capacity ;
- d. Create an enabling environment for stakeholders engagement and by providing effective leadership and governance with robust accountability mechanisms;
- e. Establish and / or strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration and action to leverage on social determinants of health and other health related SDGs;
- f. Provide the right institutional structure and functions for their Ministries of Health to ensure effective leadership capacity for planning, coordination, partnership and inter-sectoral collaboration;
- g. Strengthen data availability and quality; synthesis and utilization to inform policy making processes; along with research agendas and findings;
- h. Embrace and adapt new innovations and initiatives including e health technologies.

(2) Donors, bi-lateral partners and development partners are encouraged to:

- a. Align their technical and financial support to each country's priorities and systems needs and context;
- b. Support governments to build capacity for planning, coordination and policy dialogue;
- c. Tailor their support to countries based on the context of the countries and to avoid a "one size fits all" approach;
- d. Support countries to adopt innovations and scale up use and application of health technology, especially digitized information platforms at all tiers of the health system.

(3) Private sector, Civil Society, NGOs and other stakeholders are encouraged to:

- a) Engage with Government in policy discussions, plans and advocacy for UHC;
- b) Promote and demand partner and government accountability in building sustained systems, programs and services;

(4) The WHO is encouraged to:

- a. Provide the appropriate tools, guidance and technical support to countries to ensure planning for national investment and implementation of the actions that promotes effective health systems;
- b. Facilitate effective monitoring and comparison of lessons between and amongst countries and work with governments and RECs to ensure that UHC and the SDGs are achieved;
- c. Provide support to countries to expand operational research to guide implementation approaches and mechanisms;
- d. Establish systems and approaches for building better inter-sectoral collaboration for health systems strengthening in member states;
- e. Facilitate establishment of relevant sub-regional platforms (virtual and otherwise) for improved stakeholder engagement on strengthening health systems for UHC and SDGs.

It is proposed to hold annual meetings of Directors and DGs of planning of Ministries of Health as a follow up to this forum to monitor progress with Strengthening Health Systems for UHC and SDGs, and build a sustained platform to continue to exchange ideas, lessons and experiences.

Drawn at Windhoek on the 13 day of December 2016