



MEDIA release

The African Region to initiate action towards the attainment of the Health SDGs by strengthening health systems

12 December 2016, Windhoek, Namibia/Brazzaville, Congo – The First Regional Forum on Strengthening Health Systems for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) opened today in Windhoek, Namibia with the theme *Healthy Systems, Healthy People: Making Universal Health Coverage Work for Africa*. The Forum, organized by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO) in collaboration with the Government of Namibia, will initiate the WHO Africa Region’s actions towards implementation of the health SDG and Universal Health Coverage.

In particular, the Forum aims to bring the technical leadership of Ministries of Health together with partners and other stakeholders to share experiences and agree on an African approach to building sustained, resilient and robust health systems. It will also aid countries to create a set of common measurable actions needed to develop effective health systems across the region in order to propel them towards attaining Universal Health Coverage and achieving the SDGs.

“We must see health as a prerequisite, a determinant and an outcome of all the SDGs, and not merely the ‘health goal’,” Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, said at the opening of the Forum, calling on governments to provide the necessary stewardship in order to reach UHC and SDG targets.

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly 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. The SDGs therefore require effective health systems in countries, with services that are designed and distributed towards achieving UHC – leaving no-one behind.

Making health coverage universal requires ensuring that everyone is able to access health services without economic, cultural, social, geographic or system-related barriers. It is only when inequities of systems such as unavailability of essential medicines, shortage of human power and delays due to inefficient logistics are addressed – and systems enabled to overcome these challenges – that the SDGs can be achieved and Universal Health Coverage attained.

Speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister of Namibia, and expressing her country’s determination to pursue the SDGs for the betterment of the lives of the Namibian people, Honorable Laura McLeod-Katjirua, Governor- of Khomas Region, said, *“We are expecting that this forum, which is the first of its kind in Africa, will help expedite the efforts of countries in the Region towards Universal Health Coverage and achievement of SDGs. Hence, strengthening the health systems is an indispensable prerequisite to realize our goal of a healthy nation.”*

Health is at the core of building wealthy and secure nations, and health systems are at the core of all efforts to ensure health for the people of the African Region. Hence, countries need resilient and robust health systems in order to deliver on their health agenda, mitigate dangers to health, lives and livelihoods caused by

emergencies and disease outbreaks, and eventually meet the targets of the SDGs and attain universal health coverage.

Dr Moeti noted, “*Investments in health systems are an important insurance for securing societies and their development,*” calling for a high level political commitment with a clear vision of health in the SDGs to be at the heart of countries’ efforts. She further underscored the need to develop “*mechanisms to ensure in-depth inter-sectoral engagement and thereby to reinforce multi-stakeholder commitments and collaboration.*” As expressed by the Regional Director, involving communities, harnessing modern technologies and intensifying research and gathering and monitoring of data is also key to ownership, successful implementation and sustainability of health programs leading towards the achievement of the SDGs.

WHO AFRO will intensify its health advocacy efforts across governments to ensure that the SDGs and Universal Health Coverage remain at the forefront of political and development agendas. It will also continue to create an evidence base to support the development and implementation of SDG-oriented national policies, strategies and plans as well as people-centered health services. It will further intensify its health system strengthening efforts to ensure both country and global public health security and resilience.

End.

For more information:

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