

Foreword

In 2003 alone, an estimated 2.3 million people died of AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. Tuberculosis on the continent has reached a staggering 2 million cases per year. Malaria is responsible for 300 million acute illnesses and at least 1 million annual deaths in Africa, with 70 percent of those being children under age 5. The world has rarely seen loss of life of such magnitude.

The combined effect of these diseases is devastating. They are destroying livelihoods, accentuating poverty, undermining countries' productive capacities, overwhelming health systems and threatening national security.

In response to these alarming trends, in 2000 the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) brought together African Heads of State, policymakers, academics and civil society for the African Development Forum (ADF) II on "AIDS: The Greatest Leadership Challenge," to raise awareness and develop an action plan for tackling the epidemic. In 2000 and 2001 African Heads of State and Government met in Abuja, Nigeria under the auspices of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) where they acknowledged the immense challenges posed by these diseases and committed themselves to a number of monitorable targets in the fight against them.

The Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Other Related Infectious Diseases in 2001 tasked the OAU (now the African Union (AU)), ECA, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the World Health Organization (WHO), alongside other relevant UN specialized agencies, to track progress made in the implementation of the Abuja pledges.

As a show of sustained commitment, eight Heads of State in Africa led by Nigeria's President established AIDS Watch Africa to coordinate implementation. They also reaffirmed the Abuja Declarations and Plans of Action when they adopted the July 2003 Maputo Declaration on Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases.

Scoring African Leadership for Better Health is the outcome of two years of collaborative effort between these organizations. The report is about hope: hope that good leadership can make a difference in peoples' lives, hope that good leadership can turn the tide against these diseases, hope that African leaders will honour their commitments.

The report is not an exhaustive assessment of country performance. It comes too soon after the Abuja Declarations for definitive data to be collected on all the commitments. However, it does provide benchmarks of how African countries are doing in keeping to their promises to tackle these diseases. Subsequent reports will build on these benchmarks to track progress and performance.

This landmark work identifies areas that need further impetus, cites best country practices in implementing the necessary reforms inside and outside health systems, and highlights lessons learnt.

Scoring African Leadership for Better Health shows that African countries continue to take action on the Abuja Declarations but that much more needs to be done. The report sends a message particularly to those that have the power or the means to make things happen. Foremost among them are governments who have the primary duty for ensuring the well-being of their citizens. But this message is not only for Heads of State and Health Ministers. The whole range of development partners also have a major responsibility to keep their promises to the future generations of Africans.

The report makes a simple point: we have the means and the scientific knowledge to decrease the loss of life and hardships caused by these diseases. What is needed is leadership that translates what we have at hand into concrete action for a better, longer life for all.

Alpha Oumar Konaré
African Union

K.Y. Amoako
ECA

Peter Piot
UNAIDS

Lee Jong-wook
WHO