

Report on the meeting “UN Inter-Agency collaboration with IGAD on health and related issues including development of a health desk”

Addis Ababa, 02 December 2002

A pre-workshop meeting on “UN Inter-Agency collaboration with IGAD on health and related issues including development of a health desk” was held in Addis Ababa, on 02 December 2002. It was organised by WHO/WAC, IOM, UNAIDS and the AU, and had the participation of representatives of several UN agencies located in Addis Ababa (see annex

The meeting was chaired by Dr. Emelia Timpo of UNAIDS who gave the opening remarks about the importance of this initiative following the Task Force meeting on “The Definition of the Elements of the Platform of Co-operation between the World Health Organisation (OMS), the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs),” held in Addis Ababa, from 19-20 June 2002.

This was followed by a presentation of the recommendations of the Task Force given by Dr. Luis Filipe Loureiro. In his presentation he highlighted the major areas for co-operation between WHO and the RECs. He stressed the importance of WAC in the development of the health sector in the RECs, in collaboration with health partners, following the AU/NEPAD health agenda. Among other considerations, he mentioned the importance of the RECs in identifying the health strategies that need strengthening. Thus WAC and AU are important in the co-ordination and monitoring and evaluation of activities, at a continental level, as opposed to the responsibilities at regional and national levels, which are the domain of the RECs. Measures to reduce the brain drain phenomenon affecting the African health sector were also described, and the importance of investing in the health sector was considered an important recommendation to deal with this problem.

Dr. Frank Gutmann from IOM gave a presentation entitled “Strengthening Health Facilities and HIV/AIDS Prevention and Management Activities for Migrant and Mobile Populations in the Horn of Africa Cross-Border Areas”. He mentioned that IOM’s worldwide mandate is to advocate for the rights and welfare of migrants, including their health, and that to this end, IOM has signed agreements with UNAIDS and WHO to address these issues. Migrant populations are often marginalized, making them particularly vulnerable to poverty and poor health. Both of these later conditions augment the spread of HIV and other diseases, which perpetuate the cycle of poverty, poor health, poor quality of life and shortened lifespan. He further described some of the characteristics and migration patterns of the cross-border areas in the Horn. He then concluded his presentation stressing the need to have a health desk at IGAD, which will be able to harmonise the efforts of the government, the private sector and the civil society in order to improve health care facilities and health services in the region, and to contribute to the economic development of the Horn of Africa countries.

Mr. Correia, Director of WAC, spoke of the importance of the creation of a health desk at IGAD. He stressed that it is important to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the health partners working in health and health related sectors. This will avoid the duplication of activities and allow for better co-ordination of information concerning ongoing activities. It is important that political issues be addressed in addition to technical issues in the creation of the health desk.

Attention was drawn to the various initiatives taking place within then IGAD region, including UNDP programmes concerning health carried out in conjunction with IGAD in the ambit of the Horn of Africa Initiative.

The various agencies present agreed that WHO should be the lead agency for health issues with IGAD. It was suggested that mobile units could play an important role in the future of the health desk in addressing the needs of migrant populations. It was also mentioned that the governments of Horn of Africa countries have a commitment to address the health needs of the entire region so that areas like the cross-border regions will not be overlooked. They need to work in conjunction with the health desk in order for it to be a success.

Other areas that were mentioned for special reference from the participants were the relationship between HIV and reproductive health. The point was made that these two closely linked issues should not be dealt with in isolation.

It was also mentioned by the participants that the human rights issues couldn't be separated from the health issues, as health is listed among the rights of every human being and governments need to be accountable in instances where this is not the case. The Human Rights Office in Geneva needs to be involved in the many processes regarding the health and related sectors. It is important that during conflict situations, when the health systems are often disrupted, refugees and internally displaced people have access to proper health care, as is their right regardless of who they are and where they are from.

It was also mentioned that there is a lack of information regarding health issues among the various RECs. If we are to strengthen the African health sector, current data must be available to better equip the RECs in their efforts to deal with the problems and to assist them in the allocation of resources.

There has to be a commitment by governments in the region to endorse the proposed plan of action to develop the health sector. It is also known that the region of the Horn has been facing conflict problems and this greatly contributes to the under funding and underdevelopment of the health and related sectors.

It is however important to mention that the overall focus of this pre-workshop is not only to address cross border areas but the entire IGAD region; it is, however, known that cross-border areas usually lack the necessary support from the governments even though various groups inhabit or migrate through them. It is therefore very important to come up with regional programmes instead of country-based programmes.

The role of the civil society, NGOs and other health partners is crucial for the development of the health sector in the region. However, and probably even more important, is the fact that there needs to be a good co-ordination of all the activities of these partners; only then will duplication of activities and better allocation of human and financial resources be achieved – thus the importance of the creation of a health and social affairs desk.

Follow up activities / recommendations decided upon

- 1- Mr. Correia will be on a mission to Djibouti to discuss with Dr. B. Atallah, Executive Secretary of IGAD the establishment of the health desk and how future collaboration will be done among health partners
- 2- WHO will be the lead Agency for health related issues with IGAD
- 3- IGAD Member States need to work closely to address the needs of cross border areas
- 4- On health related matters the issue of human rights need to be addressed as health is a human right; on interventions related to HIV / AIDS, issues concerning reproductive health should be also addressed
- 5- WHO should help in the assessment of the role of Civil Society Organisations working in the field of health, so that there will be better co-ordination of the activities and better flow of information among health partners and the Head of the Health Desk
- 6- The issue of human resources need to be urgently addressed to prevent the brain drain, but also to contribute to the development of the health sector

Annex 1 - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE PRE-WORKSHOP MEETING

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