



THE 7TH GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON HEALTH PROMOTION

EDITORIAL

The hosting of 7th Global Conference is an opportunity to share experiences relating to this key component of health care. It is a timely event, as the conference is taking place when people's health is threatened by a variety of new global challenges. Health promotion interventions are cost effective means by which to address these threats to improve people's health. This bulletin will give you daily highlights of the conference proceedings. We hope you find it useful, and we wish you productive deliberations.

*Dr A. J Diarra-Nama,
Director, Division of Noncommunicable diseases, WHO Regional Office for Africa.*

Nairobi, the Kenyan Capital, is hosting the 7th Global Conference on Health Promotion. The opening session was presided over by President Mwai Kibaki. With him was the Regional director of WHO, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, the Kenyan Health ministers, the Deputy Permanent Secretary for Health of Thailand, and Professor Sir Michael Marmot.



His Excellency President Mwai Kibaki with dignitaries after the official opening of the conference

At the official opening ceremony of the conference, the speakers emphasized the importance of health promotion at a time that countries across the world are facing major health sector challenges such as poverty, epidemics, pandemics, high levels of maternal and child mortality and climate change.

The Deputy Permanent Secretary of Health from Thailand, Dr Sathaporn Wongchareon, underlined the fact that since the Bangkok conference much progress had been made in health promotion as many countries are trying to integrate it into Health programmes to strengthen health systems. Nevertheless, he emphasised the importance of surmounting the many difficulties still facing healthcare provision.

The former Chairman of the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health explained the background to the commission's work, noting that much new information had emerged since the Alma Ata declaration. He further urged countries to implement the recommendations of the Commission's report taking into account their own specific multisectoral environments.

The Regional Director of WHO, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, encouraged participants to share their experiences and learn from each other so that Health Promotion could help to bridge the implementation gap and contribute to improving the health of people. He outlined a number of obstacles that continue to prevent access to quality healthcare.

The Kenyan Minister for Medical Services, Professor Ngongo, urged both government officials and the general public to increase efforts to promote universal access to healthcare. His counterpart, the Minister for Public Health and Sanitation, Hon Beth Mugo said that Health Promotion could contribute to health system strengthening across the world and she encouraged African countries to intensify cross border cooperation to combat diseases such as polio and measles.

President Kibaki reminded delegates of five key actions recommended at the previous Global Conference on Health Promotion held in Bangkok, Thailand, and appealed to the international community to address the major health challenges through multisectoral collaboration for health promotion and innovative methods of mobilizing resources.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS: DAY ONE

At the first plenary session of the conference, chaired by the Regional Director of WHO, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, Dr Ala Alwan, assistant Director General of WHO, gave his remarks to set the scene for the presentations on the theme of Action on social determinants of health for health equity.

Dr Alwan emphasised the benefits of well implemented health promotion initiatives and their use as a tool for advocacy to policy makers. According to him, 14 million premature deaths from non-communicable diseases could be prevented by effective health promotion initiatives particularly if targeted at addressing the underlying social causes.

Dr Alwan reminded delegates of key elements of the Alma Ata declaration which are:

- The adoption of healthy policies
- Building capacity in health promotion
- Supporting community action
- Reorienting health services, making them more people-centred.

He noted that the poor are disproportionately affected by non-communicable diseases and called for an elevation of the priority given to addressing NCDs which is not among the MDGs.

In the following presentation Professor Sir Michel Marmot, the former Chair of the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, outlined key elements for successful health promotion:

- Social Justice
- The empowerment of people, socially, psychologically and politically.
- The creation of conditions that allow people to take control of their lives.

He discussed major factors impacting upon the health of populations, particularly in low-income countries, noting that although the global financial crisis had been caused by rich countries it was mainly affecting the poorer nations. He also pointed out that in most countries the question is not a lack of money, but what is done with it and how it is distributed.

He reinforced Dr Alwan's comments, stressing the importance of health promotion in encouraging health policies that promote social justice and health equity.

Professor Miriam Were, a recent Noguchi Prize recipient, shared personal experiences from her community work in the final presentation of the morning. She emphasized the problem of low life expectancy in African countries. She also shared her hope that the continent would bridge the gap by coming together to pool efforts.

The later sessions saw delegates learning from experiences across the globe such as the use of mass events as opportunities for health promotion; strengthening community response to pandemics and diabetes and development.



A view of participants at the opening ceremony in the Amphitheatre of the Kenyatta International Conference Centre



Cultural dancers show their skills during the opening event

IN BRIEF

- **Over 500 delegates from 102 countries are participating in the 7th Global conference on Health Promotion.**
- **The third day of the conference will focus specifically on health promotion in Africa**
- **Conference participants will each visit one of ten different health promotion initiatives in Nairobi**
- **Delegates are working on a call to action which will be one of the main outputs of the conference.**

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