Delegates at the 66th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa adopted several priority actions to guide implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Member States.

Prior to adoption of the proposed actions, the WHO secretariat presented a report that identified key challenges that hindered the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in most countries. These included fragmentation of interventions; inadequate health financing; weak health systems; unequal access to effective services; weak health security, and weak multi-sectoral responses.

The Report indicated that countries which made good progress towards attainment of MDGs did so only in certain populations. The 17 SDGs succeeded the MDGs and will guide global development up to 2030. Lessons learnt from the MDG era, will be useful in the implementation of the SDGs.

After deliberations, the delegates agreed that Member States should strive to have one national plan, one coordination mechanism, and one Monitoring and Evaluation framework for the implementation of the SDGs agenda.

Additionally, delegates emphasized the importance of multi-sectoral actions to address social, environmental and economic determinants of health and to reduce health inequities. This, they added, necessitates having a Health-in-All-Policies approach to development. Delegates acknowledged past challenges in multi-sectoral approaches and expressed the need for legal and policy instruments to facilitate such actions at national level. Inadequate community participation was also noted as a challenge to SDG implementation.

The delegates agreed to ensure long-term, predictable and sustainable financing for SDGs and to strengthen primary health care and health systems. They also highlighted the need to improve accountability. The need to generate and use data was indicated as central in SDG planning and monitoring frameworks.

In the discussions, Member States were encouraged to commit to in-country financing reforms that would correspond to the requirements of achieving the SDGs. In addition, it was suggested that countries develop investment cases for health.

The delegates urged WHO to continue supporting Member States to develop and implement country-led strategic plans and to strengthen their advocacy capacity for SDGs. They also requested WHO to support Member States to generate and utilize resources for implementation of health-related SDGs and monitoring of progress towards the health targets. The need to organize periodic reviews was also highlighted.
The humanitarian crisis affecting your country since 2013 has shaked the health system, sometimes up to 30% of the health workers have been on strike. As the situation in the country normalizes, what is the health system situation especially health service delivery?

There is improvement in the health system and in service delivery in 3 key areas. The capacities of health facilities have been strengthened, including with support from partners. This has resulted in reactivation of health care services in 73% of health facilities in the country. In Bangui City, 100% of the health facilities are now operational. Health facilities have been provided with enough stocks of drugs to manage common diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea and respiratory infections, among others.

In addition, health facilities have been provided with delivery and case care sections kits for obstetric complications. Health facilities and community centres have been rehabilitated and equipped in the capital city and in some prefectures (Regional Administration Divisions) affected by the crisis. Finally, we have redeployed health workers. Sixty five doctors and 76 paramedics have strengthened the teams in the health facilities in Bangui and in 16 prefectures.

What are the challenges you face building a resilient health system in the Central African Republic today?

The challenges are many. There is the low budget allocation for health from the government which is 9% of the total government budget. This situation unfortunately follows the declaration by the Abuja Declaration that the amount to be spent by the government on health should be 15% of the total budget. There is also the lack of disbursement of funds for health creates dependence on international partners. Inadequate human resources quantitatively and qualitatively is also a challenge. Weakness of the information system due to lack of communication equipment, lotted during the civil crisis, delays investigations and response to outbreaks. Finally, the volatile security situation remains a major concern.

What can you say about WHO’s support to improve the health system?

WHO supported us in all phase of the crisis. In addition to technical support, WHO has played a key role in resource mobilization. The ongoing health system recovery in the country is credited to this support. I take this opportunity to express gratitude of the Government of Central African Republic for the constant support.

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