

MOVING TOWARDS UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION-THE GAMBIA ANNUAL REPORT 2017



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ACRONYMS

BOS GVAP MDA NCD PBM POA SDH UNDAF UNICEF WCO

Non-Communicable Disease

"....I have identified five interrelated and overlapping priorities." They are: (i) improving health security; (ii) strengthening national health systems; (iii) sustaining focus on the health-related MDGs/SDGs; (iv) addressing the social determinants of health; and (v) transforming the African Region into a responsive and results-driven Organization."

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti WHO Regional Director for Africa

MESSAGE FROM THE WHO REPRESENTATIVE



Dear Esteemed Reader:

The World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in The Gambia (WCO–The Gambia) is pleased to share with you key highlights of its work during 2017. This report synthesizes some of the key achievements registered jointly with our diverse partners in our endeavors to complement national efforts in achieving national, regional and global health goals and targets. The 2016-2020 Country Cooperation Strategy for The Gambia that guides the WHO's work in the country focuses on Health System Strengthening, improving health security; addressing the social determinants of health; SDG3 health priorities in line with the Global and Regional transformation agenda.

Bearing our diverse audiences in mind, we have attempted to present the report in a user-friendly format to help you navigate easily by using photos and images to illustrate our progress. We hope this meets your expectations.

Indeed, 2017 was an interesting year — full of challenges and hope — as The Gambia grappled with the political impasse following the 2016 presidential election and the transition into democratic governance. Migration of young people from Europe, Libya and other parts of the world, coupled with economic stagnation in the past few years, have no doubt impacted the delivery of much needed health care to people in need. Despite the challenges, the WCO was able to do its best.

In conclusion, let me sincerely thank the Government and people of The Republic of The Gambia, particularly the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare, Finance and Economic Affairs, Justice, Education, Foreign Affairs, Tourism and Culture, Communication and Transport, to name but a few, as well as our sister United Nations Agencies, development partners, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and the communities for their support and collaboration.

Let me also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the WHO Regional Office for Africa and WHO Headquarters for the excellent support and teamwork in achieving the milestones highlighted in this report.

My final but sincere appreciation and thanks goes to UN Volunteers Mrs. Lynette Ledbetter and Mr. Tarek Jacob who offered their free service in editing/proof reading and layout & design of this report respectively.

Dr Desta A. Tiruneh

WHO Representative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to document some of the key milestones achieved during the year 2017 as contributions to the attainment of national, regional and global health goals and targets. The successes highlighted in the report are a result of the strong collaboration within the three levels of the Organization; partnership with and support of the Government of The Gambia, in particular the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) and other arms of Government; and the United Nations System, non-governmental organizations and civil societies and communities.

To strengthen the prevention and control of communicable diseases, we provided support for the development, review and updates of many policies, strategies and guidelines, including the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS, National Hepatitis Policy, National Hepatitis Strategic Plan, National TB Strategic Plan, Malaria Case Management Guidelines, Malaria Training Manual, Guidelines and Training Manual for Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and the Comprehensive Multi-Year Plan on Immunization.

It was possible to treat 125,190 people in 24 districts countrywide with mass drug administration (MDA) for preventive chemotherapy against schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminthiasis. Support was also provided to strengthen the national immunization services by introducing new vaccines into the routine immunization against measles and rubella.

In the non-communicable diseases (NCDs) category, key milestones achieved included increasing taxation on tobacco products, monitoring tobacco use among adolescents through the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS), mobilizing UN support for NCD prevention and control through the inclusion of NCDs in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2017, strengthening management of diabetes and hypertension at a number of health facilities, and treating common mental disorders at the primary health care level.

In the reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH) category, support was provided to develop a National RMNCAH Policy and Strategic Plan and a National Cervical Cancer Strategic Plan (2016-2020). Support was also provided to conduct maternal death audits at the community level.

In the health systems category, support was provided to conduct an assessment of the technical and institutional capacity of the Health Services Directorate, develop health posting and transfer guidelines, and facilitate the costing and validation of a basic healthcare package of minimum essential services offered for neonates, infants, children, adolescents, mothers/women and men at the primary level.

A Public Health Procurement and Supply Chain Management Committee was established to enhance capacity for the procurement and management of medical supplies, in addition to the development of a quality assurance plan to facilitate implementation of the medicines policy, and the development of blood transfusion guidelines to strengthen national blood transfusion services.

Support was provided to enhance functionality of the health information system for planning and decision making by printing and disseminating a national health sector indicator booklet developed in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The first annual health sector review was supported, which also included a joint review of the annual operational plans derived from the National Health Sector Strategic Plan (2014-2020).

Support was also provided to strengthen overall health security through the Joint External Evaluation (JEE), which included strengthening the national disease surveillance system and developing a national public health laboratory policy and occupational health and safety strategic plan.

Efforts were stepped up to increase visibility of the work of the WHO Country Office (WCO) by strengthening the health reporting capacity of journalists. This was facilitated by providing training for the Association of Health Journalists in December 2017 on new techniques and guidelines in health reporting and how to increase or improve coverage of health issues in media institutions and establishments.

Partnership was also strengthened within the health sector and other critical ministries/arms of government such as Finance, Justice, Communication and Transport, the United Nations System, development partners, non-governmental organizations, civil societies and communities to promote and mobilize support for health.



PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

The main focus of this area of work is to strengthen national capacity to deliver key interventions for the prevention and control of HIV and hepatitis B, review and adapt evidence-based tools and guidelines, implement and monitor global strategies for the prevention and control of tuberculosis and malaria, and implement and monitor strategies for the control of neglected topical diseases. It also covers capacity-strengthening for the delivery of immunization services, and implementation and monitoring of measles and rubella control strategies.

HIV/AIDS/Hepatitis

Key achievements:

- Supported Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) for Global Fund grant management
- Completed Global Fund programme continuation application to secure funding for the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020
- Developed Guidelines and Training Manual for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
- Developed National Hepatitis Policy and Strategic Plan

WHO continues to be an important contributor to the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and STIs in The Gambia. WHO is part of the CCM Executive Committee and provides support for key programmatic decisions and guidance. WHO supported the HIV/AIDS programme in the development of the Global Fund programme continuation application which resulted in secured funding for the next three years for activities within the National Strategic Plan. The most recent National Sentinel Surveillance for HIV reveals a decline in prevalence from 1.6% in 2012 to 1.4% in 2016.

Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) infection is endemic in The Gambia, with 15% to 20% of the population being chronic carriers. Therefore, strategies are required for reducing morbidity and mortality associated with hepatitis. In keeping with the Global Hepatitis Programme, WHO supported the development of a five-year National Hepatitis Policy and Strategic Plan.

Tuberculosis (TB)

Key achievements:

- Reviewed and updated the National TB Strategic Plan in line with the WHO End TB Strategy
- Assessed The Gambia's capacity to detect, diagnose and manage multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB)
- Completed Global Fund programme continuation application to secure funding for the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020

In keeping with the current regional and global TB priorities, the National TB Strategic Plan was updated to align with the WHO End TB Strategy. The goal set out in the current NSP is in line with that of the End TB Strategy, which is to end the TB epidemic by 2035. WHO supported the programme to conduct an assessment of the programmatic and management capacity to detect, diagnose and manage MDR-TB. Currently, WHO is working on implementing the recommendations from the assessment.

Malaria

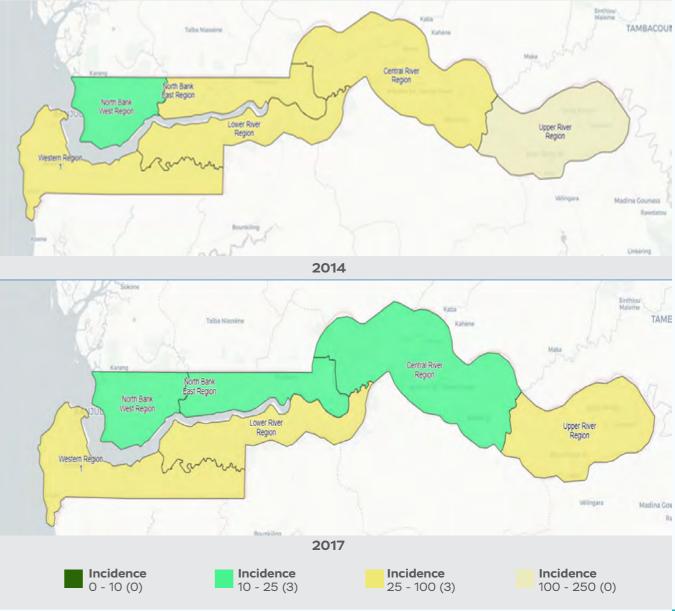
Key achievements:

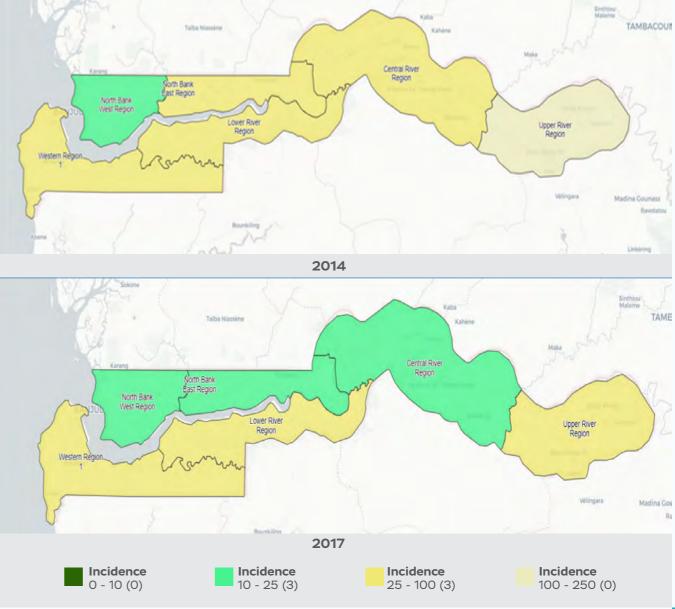
Although there has been significant reduction in the parasite prevalence for malaria, which has declined more than 90% in all health districts, support was provided to strengthen capacity for surveillance to consolidate the gains already made as the country moves into the pre-elimination phase. The following are some of the specific areas of support:

- Strengthening of malaria cross-border surveillance
- Review and adaptation of the malaria case management guidelines and training manual
- Development of Global Fund programme continuation application to secure funding for the period 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2021

WCO is working closely with the National Malaria Control Program towards achieving the goal of eliminating malaria in the country. As the prevalence of malaria decreases in the country, focus is on strengthening surveillance at all levels. In this regard, WHO provided support to the program during the Global Fund grant-making process to include surveillance activities for malaria. WCO continues to provide support to strengthen cross-border surveillance activities. Support was also provided for the update of the malaria case management guidelines and training manual.

Reduction in Malaira Incidence by Region in The Gambia, in 2014 and 2017





Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs)

Key achievements:

- Reached 125,190 people in 24 districts with Mass Drug Administration of Preventive
- Chemotherapy for NTDs schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminthiasis
- Developed NTD Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

The need to conduct mass treatment of this scale resulted from an integrated schistosomiasis (SCI) and soil-transmitted helminthiasis (STH) mapping conducted in the country in May 2015. The results indicated prevalence of SCI and STH to be 2.5% and 4.3% respectively at the national level. The prevalence at district level was as high as 22% for SCI and 55% for STH. A total of 24 districts were treated; 22 for SCH and 2 for STH. At the end of the campaign, a total of 125,190 individuals were treated for both conditions combined. National coverage of the population who received treatment for SCH and STH was 68.75% and 77.26% respectively.

Vaccine preventable diseases

Key achievements:

The overall achievement in this area of work focused on capacity strengthening for the development and implementation of plans and strategies, advocacy and partnership with key stakeholders to improve uptake of immunization services, and laboratory surveillance for measles. The following specific achievements are worth citing:

- A national, comprehensive Multi-Year Plan and annual plans for immunization were developed as a contribution to the implementation and monitoring of the Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP)
- Advocacy and social mobilization were strengthened to increase awareness of immunization services by enlisting the support of public and private media houses during the African Vaccination Week commemoration
- Measles and rubella vaccines were introduced into the routine immunization services as a contribution towards facilitating implementation and monitoring of the global measles and rubella elimination strategies.
- Pediatric bacterial meningitis (PBM) and rotavirus sentinel surveillance was strengthened at the health facility level by training health workers across the seven health regions







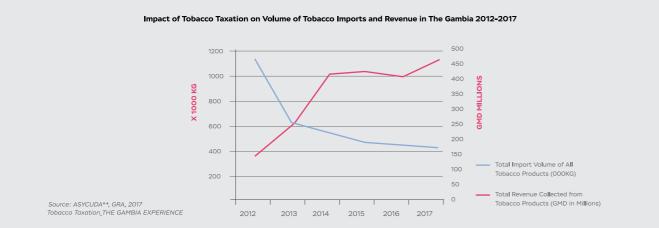
This area of work covers capacity building for the development of a national multisectoral plan to prevent and control NCDs; for the implementation of strategies to reduce modifiable risk factors for NCDs; for improving health care coverage for the management of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases and their risk factors; for the development and implementation of national mental health policies and laws; for the integration of mental health into primary health care; for promoting road safety; and for the implementation and monitoring of an action plan based on maternal, infant and young child nutrition.

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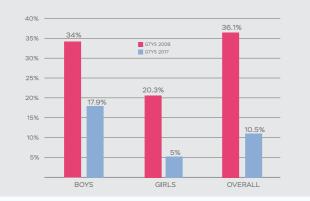
Key achievements:

- Mobilization of UN support for the prevention and control of NCDs through inclusion of NCDs into the current UNDAF 2017
- The three-year tobacco taxation policy, introduced during 2013-2015, was extended to 2017. This resulted in increased revenue from Gambian Dalasi (GMD) 420.06 million in 2016 to GMD 470.30 million in 2017, and a decline in tobacco imports from 427,780 kg in 2016 to 418,340 kg in 2017
- A new mental health bill 2017 was developed to replace the archaic Lunatics Detention Act of 1917 to strengthen capacity for the implementation of the Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020
- Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) was conducted in December 2017 to monitor the trend/ prevalence of tobacco use among children aged 13-15 years. Preliminary findings of the survey suggest that prevalence of tobacco use (ever smoked tobacco) among children has declined by about 5.7%, from 24.5% (28.1% for boys and 20.3% for girls) in 2008 to about 18.8% in 2017 (31% for boys and 9.2% for girls). A similar trend was observed among current cigarette smokers—from 10.8% (12.7% for boys and 8.6% for girls) in 2008 to 6.5% (11.7% for boys and 2.5% for girls) in 2017, representing a decline of 4.3% in overall prevalence
- In a related development, a roadmap was created with tobacco cessation clinics piloted in five health facilities, situated in three out of the seven health regions, to strengthen capacity for the implementation of the National Tobacco Control Act 2016
- Diagnosis and management of diabetes and hypertension was strengthened at four public health facilities in the West Coast Region through a three-year project funded by the World Diabetes Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, WCO and other partners
- Management of common mental health conditions at the primary health care level was strengthened through the training of 36 primary health care workers in two health regions (Lower River and West Coast), using WHO mhGAP guidelines

Imapct of tax policay changes on revenue and volume



Trend in Current use of any tobacco product in the Gambia 2008 and 2017



REPRODUCTIVE, MATERNAL, NEWBORN, CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH (RMNCAH)

This area of work aims at building capacity to expand access to and improve the quality of effective interventions for ending preventable pre-pregnancy to postpartum maternal, perinatal and newborn deaths; to implement and monitor integrated strategic plans for newborn and child health; and to implement and monitor effective interventions to cover unmet needs in sexual and reproductive health in order to strengthen intersectoral action to address the social determinants of health (SDH).

Key achievements:

- A countrywide assessment of the capacity of health facilities to manage RMNCAH, socio-cultural factors contributing to maternal, newborn, child and adolescent mortality, and health-seeking behavior on RMNCAH at the community level
- A National Reproductive and Child Health Policy and Strategic Plan (2017-2021) was developed
- National cervical cancer guidelines, protocol and strategies were developed, costed and implemented
- Maternal death audit and verbal autopsy at the community level was supported in the seven health regions
- A situational analysis on Social Determinants of Health was conducted and the report was shared with partners, paving the way for the development of a national health-in-all policies framework in the next biennium.



HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The main focus of this area of work is to strengthen capacity to assess health risks and develop and implement policies, strategies or regulations for the prevention, mitigation and management of the health impacts of environmental and occupational risks.

Key achievement:

• A national occupational and health safety strategic plan was developed by training health care workers in infection prevention and control in hospitals and all public health settings, and by managing occupational hazards and improving work place safety as contributions towards the overall prevention and management of the health impacts of environmental risk

STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH SYSTEMS

This area of work focuses on strengthening national health governance, improving health financing in line with universal health coverage, enhancing health service delivery and orienting the health workforce towards universal health coverage.

Key achievements:

Achievements in this area of work are centred mainly on strengthening health governance, improving the monitoring of quality health service delivery as well as strengthening human resources for health. Below are some specific accomplishments:

- To strengthen the management of public health service delivery, WCO supported a Ministry of Health assessment of the technical and institutional capacity of the Health Service Directorate at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Detailed recommendations and a proposed roadmap for implementation of recommendations were developed as part of a reforms measure of the health sector
- Health Posting and Transfer Guidelines were finalized and disseminated to enhance the distribution of the health workforce in public health facilities
- Ministry of Health and Social Welfare & WCO joint planning for the elaboration of the WHO Programme Budget 2018-19 in line with the health sector programme policies, plans and priorities of the Country Cooperation Strategy. The basic healthcare package of minimum essential services offered for the newborn, infant, child, adolescent, mother/woman and man at the primary level was costed and validated in collaboration with UNICEF. Using the National Health Policy as a guide, the identified package of services is a key step towards outlining the necessary elements for achieving universal coverage

HEALTH SYSTEMS INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE

This area of work focuses on supporting the country as it monitors national health situations, trends, inequalities and determinants, using global standards, including data collection and analysis to address data gaps and system performance assessment.

Key achievements:

- Functionality of the Health Information System for planning and decision making was enhanced through printing and dissemination of a national health sector indicator booklet developed in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- The first annual health sector review was held in December 2017, encompassing a joint review of the annual operational plans derived from the National Health Sector Strategic Plan (2014-2020)

ACCESS TO MEDICINES AND OTHER HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES AND STRENGTHENING REGULATORY CAPACITY

This area of work focuses on strengthening national capacity to implement and monitor the national medicines policy with specific focus on integration of traditional medicine into the main national healthcare delivery system, strengthening national blood transfusion services, and development of a legislative framework for national blood transfusion services and a national medicines formulary.

Key achievements:

- capacity for the procurement and management of medical supplies and to enhance coordination within the health sector
- A quality assurance plan to facilitate implementation of the medicines policy was developed, as well as blood transfusion guidelines to strengthen national blood transfusion services



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, SURVEILLANCE AND RESPONSE

Key achievements:

• A Public Health Procurement & Supply Chain Management Committee was established to enhance

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Key achievements:

- To enhance visibility of WHO's work and to improve health coverage in the media, thirty journalists from print and electronic media houses received training in health reporting. WHO information products were disseminated to media and partners, and WHO commemorative days were observed with the WR delivering statements on the national media
- Technical support was provided to Ministry of Health and local civil society groups to organize community-based dialogue on diabetes, mental health and other NCDs, in local languages, with a wide range of audiences including traditional and religious leaders, women, and youth groups
- Contributing to WHO's emergency operations geared towards ending the cholera outbreak in northern Nigeria, WHO-Gambia provided support to WHO-Nigeria in October-November 2017 to strengthen requisite communication, social mobilization and community engagement interventions as part of an effort to contain a cholera outbreak in Maiduguri, northern Nigeria
- In Delivering as One United Nations, WCO contributed to the development of a UN Communications Strategy for the implementation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as well as joint UN communication initiatives such as development of UN brochure, press conferences and commemoration of UN Day



WCO has strengthened partnership and collaboration with development partners. United Nations agencies, civil society groups, as well as various sectors of the Government.

Key achievements:

- Supported the development of the National Development Plan (2018-2021)
- Established and provided technical direction to a tripartite United Nations Group (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA) to coordinate support to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare on RMNCAH
- Strategy (BOS), which is a strategic operations document for enhancing and streamlining operations among UN agencies
- and WCO Ghana in areas of emergency preparedness and response, risk communication, Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response, as well as Strengthening Health Systems. Initiated, in partnership with UNICEF, the costing of the basic healthcare package, which includes services offered for the newborn, infant, child, adolescent, mother/woman and man at the primary level
- Improved early detection and management of diabetes and hypertension in four health facilities in the West Coast Region by training 30 health professionals and providing blood pressure machines and other equipment via a three-year partnership project involving the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, World Diabetes Foundation, WCO-Gambia and a local non-governmental organization, RAID-Gambia.
- were planning independent assessments through lobbying, coordination and guidance towards the preparation of the joint Health Systems Assessment
- Enhanced delivery of mental health services at the community level by mobilizing mental health advocacy groups to contribute to bridging the equity gap in mental health services
- Organized, in partnership with a local road safety advocacy group Youth for Road Safety (YOURS) community-based dialogue and public sensitization to commemorate UN Road Safety Week in April 2017
- In partnership with Supportive Activist Foundation (SAF), a local NGO involved in promoting mental well-being of young people, several communities and institutions were mobilized to promote mental health advocacy and public awareness on World Health Day. After receiving technical support from WCO, SAF has embarked on a national campaign on psychological first aid, reaching out to over 1000 young people both in and out of school to raise awareness on depression
- mental health through the Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Programme (mhLAP), a partnership between Ibadan and the WHO.
- Enhanced mental health promotion at the workplace in partnership with a local bank (Standard Chartered Bank) as part of activities marking World Health Day

• In partnership with other UN agencies, WCO contributed to the development the Business Operations

• WHO Country Office staff supported WHO AFRO, WCO Botswana, WCO Sierra Leone, WCO Nigeria

• Initiated a comprehensive health sector assessment by bringing together donors and partners that

• Training was offered to a national professional in psychiatry on the WHO Quality Rights Initiative in

CHALLENGES

CONCLUSION

In spite of the achievements registered, the year under review has witnessed a number of challenges that have directly or indirectly affected implementation of the Programme Budget. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Limited funds to implement programme activities 1.
- II. Late receipt of some funds close to biennial closure
- III. Weak donor landscape has made it difficult, if not impossible, to mobilize resources locally
- IV. Weak capacity of the WCO for resource mobilization
- The political impasse in January 2017, which induced a climate of fear, insecurity and uncertainty, V. negatively impacted the pace of programme implementation.
- VI. Slow retirement of funds and late submission of activity reports from DFCs have resulted in the inability to raise purchase requisitions

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges experienced and lessons learnt during the year under review, the following are some of the most urgent actions needed to improve our work in the years to come:

- Finalize the comprehensive Health Systems Assessment
- Strengthen Ministry of Health's leadership and governance capacity
- Conduct Function Review of the WCO to align staffing to country's priorities and WHO's mandate
- Strengthen adherence to WHO Business Rules and accountability frameworks
- Suspend DFC and use Direct Implementation method until Ministry financial risk is reduced to a bare minimum
- Regular engagement of national health authorities to improve accountability and efficiency in the use of WHO resources
- VII. Strengthen capacity for resource mobilization
- V.III Strengthen advocacy, partnership and engagement of critical stakeholders to support the health systems

The year under review has witnessed successes and challenges as well as key lessons for improvement for subsequent years.

Collaboration among the three levels of the WHO-Country Office, Regional Office and Headquarters—has been the major catalyst for the achievements highlighted in this report. Furthermore, partnership with key stakeholders has also contributed immensely to the realization of a good number of the accomplished milestones. Engagement of other critical ministries has facilitated delivery of some of the outputs and milestones, particularly in tobacco taxation, development of the Mental Health Bill, implementation of the 2016 Tobacco Control Act and conducting the Global Youth Tobacco Survey, to name but a few.



WHO GAMBIA STAFF



Dr. Desta A. Tiruneh WHO Representative



Mr. Alpha A.B. Jallow Public Health & Environment



Mr. Momodou Gassama Health Promotion



Mr. Momodou Ceesay Health Economist



Dr. Sharmila Lareef-Jah Disease Prevention & Control



Mrs. Surma Bajaha **Operations Assistant**



Family & Reproductive Health



Mr. George Williams Health Information Assistant



Travel & Logistics Assistant



Driver





Mr. Momodou Njie ICT Assistant



Mrs. Binta Jallow Office Assistant













Mrs. Yamundow Sowe Secretary



Mr. Alieu Sowe Senior Driver





Mr. Juma Jallow Driver



Mr. Lamin Sowe

Driver





P.M.B. 170 Banjul, Gambia I Telephone: +220 44 62283 afwcogminfo@who.int I afro.who.int/countries/gambia