

# A call for re-committing to Primary Health Care

## Dr Peter Eriki reports on the 69th WHO Regional Committee Meeting

A commitment to primary health care and a determination that no one should be denied health care because they cannot afford it were resounding messages echoed by all speakers at the well-attended and colourful opening of RC69, which took place at the Kintele Conference Centre outside Brazzaville, Congo, 19-23 August 2019.

The President of the Republic of Congo, H.E. Denis Sassou-Nguesso, delivered a message of support for universal health coverage and urged health ministers to ratify the Addis Ababa Call to Action for health financing that was agreed in February 2019. He further called for sturdier health systems, concrete action on counterfeit medicines and universal access to health care.

The WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus thanked the president, government and people of the Republic of Congo for hosting the Regional Office and congratulated the First Lady on her advocacy on sickle cell disease. He highlighted the progress made in addressing the Ebola epidemic, including the development of a vaccine with 97% efficacy and medicine for treatment with more than 90% efficacy in case of early detection. He noted challenges in addressing the current epidemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including insecurity and community resistance.

Dr Matshidiso Moeti presented the 2018-2019 Report of WHO in the African Region, outlining the significant results achieved across the 47 Member States. These results reflect the contributions of WHO country offices, the Regional Office and WHO headquarters. A major achievement underscored is the completion of the Functional Review as part of the Transformation Agenda by all countries, with 21 of them already implementing the review recommendations. This review will help WHO country offices become fit for purpose in their support to Member States. The Regional Director pointed out that WHO headquarters has adopted some of the components of the AFRO Transformation Agenda model into the global Transformation Programme.

Dr Moeti further highlighted the cutting-edge geographic information systems technology for polio work and other programmes, developed within the Regional Office. She drew attention to the 41 countries now certified Guinea worm-free; and reported that all Member States adopted the Treat All HIV policy, and that an estimated 16.3 million people living with HIV in Africa are now provided with life-saving antiretroviral therapy.

Progress was also made towards reaching the End TB Strategy, The “high-burden to high-impact” country-led

approach was launched in November 2018, to halt the rising number of malaria cases.

No wild poliovirus type 1 had been confirmed in the African Region for more than 34 months, and in November 2018, 40 Member States were declared wild poliovirus-free.

The Report further noted that 12 Member States are implementing the WHO package of essential interventions for prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, and 15 have adopted the screen-and-treat approach for cervical cancer. At least 17 countries have ratified the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

The Regional Director further noted that Member States had made significant progress in strengthening and sustaining health emergency preparedness and response capacities as well as improvements in the monitoring of priority diseases and the timely detection of epidemics.

She concluded that the Secretariat will move forward by building on the considerable progress achieved in the past year, focusing on working closely with Member States and partners to deliver on the 13th General Programme of Work, consolidating the gains made in the Transformation Agenda, advancing the UHC agenda and ending the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The delegates commended the Regional Director for a comprehensive report of the achievements, challenges and proposals for improving health in Africa. They reiterated that the many country offices now implementing the Functional Review recommendations are indeed evidence of the success of the Transformation Agenda. The health ministers committed to continue dialogue with their counterparts in finance to leverage domestic financing and establish new partnerships. Approaches such as increased taxation on commodities that are dangerous to health were recommended. Some delegates suggested the Secretariat organise a meeting of health and finance ministers to discuss ways to improve health financing.

Another important highlight of RC69 meeting was the nomination of Dr Moeti as WHO Regional Director for Africa for the second term. Dr Moeti's current term of office comes ends on 31 January 2020. She was the sole candidate for consideration. The delegates adopted a resolution requesting the Director-General to propose to the Executive Board the appointment of Dr Moeti for a five-year term that will begin in February 2020.

In her acceptance speech, Dr Moeti expressed gratitude to the President of her native Botswana for the invaluable support provided for her campaign and nomination. She promised to work equally for all 47 countries, to make sure that each and every one of them receives the best possible support from WHO. She thanked colleagues and

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staff in WHO for the firm support they had given her.

The meeting also witnessed a moving statement by a TB survivor who urged Health Ministers to prevent catastrophic costs related to the disease. It was noted that TB was responsible for a quarter of all deaths in Africa in 2018, yet domestic financing on the continent provides only 26% of the funds needed to combat the disease. Delegates were reminded that Sustainable Development Goal target of reducing the incidence of TB by 80% by 2030 can only be achieved if drastic action is taken now.

The delegates agreed to scale up a multi-sectoral approach that will result in innovative and evidence-based policies for combating TB, with increased collaboration with stakeholders and advocates who understand the culture of the communities in which they live.

The way forward is the SDGs and the End TB Strategy which set ambitious goals of ending TB by 2030. As part of the action towards multi-sectoral accountability and high level leadership, the African Heads of State and Government in 2018 endorsed the African Continental End TB Accountability Framework for Action and the End TB Scorecard initiative and asked the Africa Union Commission, working with WHO, to produce the scorecard annually. The 2018 scorecard was launched in a special session during the meeting.

The RC69 meeting further discussed the drive towards wild polio virus eradication in Africa. The meeting provided the opportunity for celebration as Africa passed a milestone threshold of three years with no case of wild poliovirus detected. Optimism and happiness was evident at the side event chaired by WHO Regional Director for Africa. Dr Moeti expressed her confidence that, 'together, we are on the verge of an extraordinary public health achievement, one which will be our legacy to our children and children's children, of the day when the wild poliovirus would have been eradicated from the continent'.

This milestone sets in motion a comprehensive evaluation process by the Africa Regional Certification Commission to determine if the entire WHO African Region of 47 countries indeed can be declared wild polio free. The certification is expected in early 2020. Joining her in recognising the momentous achievement, Steve Landry, Director of Multilateral Partnerships for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, reminded the delegates that it is still "only one step on the journey".

During this meeting, the Health Ministers discussed the double burden of malnutrition and obesity and the strategic plan to reduce the double burden in the African

Region was adopted. The plan outlines the urgent and accelerated actions that must be taken if the Region is to meet the goal of ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. The plan was received with enthusiasm by all Member States, many of them having already initiated legislative action to protect the health and nutrition of their populations. However, it was noted diets common in Africa fail to address chronic under-nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies and contribute to increased obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases.

#### RC69 Informational documents and Resolutions

- [AFR/RC69/INFO.DOC/1 Progress on the implementation of the Regional Strategy on Health Security and Emergencies](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INFO.DOC/2 Progress report on the implementation of the regional strategic plan for immunization 2014–2020](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INF.DOC/3 Progress report on the implementation of the Regional Strategy for Cancer Prevention and Control](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INF.DOC/4 Progress Report on the implementation of the regional strategy on NTDs](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INF.DOC/5 The first United Nations General Assembly High-level meeting on Tuberculosis](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INFO.DOC/6 Progress report on the implementation of the Regional Framework for Public Health Adaptation to Climate Change](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INFO.DOC/7 Progress Report towards Certification of Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategy in the African Region](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INFO.DOC/8 Report on WHO Staff in the African Region](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INFO.DOC/9 Regional Matters Arising from Reports of the WHO Internal and External Audits](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INF.DOC/10 Nomination of the Regional Director](#)
- [AFR/RC69/INF.DOC/11 Designation of an acting Regional Director for Africa](#)

#### Resolutions

- [AFR/RC69/R1 Nomination of the Regional Director](#)
- [AFR/RC69/R2 Strategic plan to reduce the double burden of malnutrition in the African Region \(2019–2025\)](#)
- [AFR/RC69/R3 Regional Strategy for IDSR 2020–2030](#)
- [AFR/RC69/R4 Vote of thanks](#)

#### Technical Documents

- [AFR/RC69/2 The Work of WHO in the African Region 2018–2019: Report of the Regional Director](#)
- [AFR/RC69/3 Statement of the Chairperson of the Programme Subcommittee to the sixty-ninth session of the Regional Committee](#)
- [AFR/RC69/4 Thirteenth General Programme of Work : 2019–2023](#)
- [AFR/RC69/5 Fourth Progress report on the Implementation of the Transformation Agenda of the World Health Organization Secretariat](#)
- [AFR/RC69/6 Regional strategy for integrated disease surveillance and response: 2020–2030](#)
- [AFR/RC69/7 Strategic plan to reduce the double burden of malnutrition in the African Region: 2019–2025](#)
- [AFR/RC69/8 Framework for provision of essential health services through strengthened district/local health systems to support UH1](#)
- [AFR/RC69/9 Framework for the implementation of the Global Vector Control Response in the WHO African Region](#)
- [AFR/RC69/10 Nomination of the Regional Director: Note by the legal counsel](#)
- [AFR/RC69/11 AFR-RC69-11 Draft provisional agenda place and dates of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa RC70](#)