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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

2017 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

Special Session Concept Note

Health and Poverty



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The Special Session on “Health and Poverty” is organised by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Background

The health of individuals and populations is one of the pillars of human development in addition to economic growth and education. The Human Development Index includes health as one of its main focal points. The relation of a population’s health to poverty has been proven and documented for decades. In 2005 the World Health Organization created the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, which provided evidence demonstrating that poverty is a strong determinant of health, and that good health is an important contributor to employment and economic growth. Good health is a means to alleviate poverty (Goal 1) and hunger (Goal 2) and facilitates learning (Goal 4) and the ability to work. Ensuring the public health of a given population requires strong multi-sectoral collaboration and partnership.

All Arab countries signed up for the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, however the development of national SDGs plans and more specifically health related SDGs plans are varied. Several countries have developed on their visions for 2030, yet few so far have set national targets and indicators. Of the two few Arab countries that reported voluntarily in 2016 (Egypt and Morocco), there was little measurement done., In terms of interlinkages and interdependence, the goals are yet to be translated into national plans to tackle health issues across sectors.

In the 13 Arab countries the percent of the population under 25 has gone from 55% in 2010 to 53% in 2015. The total fertility rate in 2013 remained high, at 3.3% on average, with Somalia leading at 7%. Fertility rates in the GCC countries have also been rising.

Life expectancy at birth in the Arab region has increased significantly from 65 years in 1990 to 70 years in 2013, close to the global average of 71 years. Under-5 mortality rates dropped by more than half across the Arab region between 1990 and 2015 to 36 per 1,000 live births, compared with the global average of 43; progress was made in all sub-regions. Nevertheless, there is considerable room for progress to be made among several key areas, which will be addressed in this Special Session:

- Youth bulge
- Aging
- Immunization
- HIV treatment
- Universal Health coverage
- Non communicable diseases
- Obesity
- Physical activity
- Tobacco
- Mental health
- Air pollution
- Road traffic injuries
- Equity
- Peace, justice and inclusiveness
- Hunger and nutrition
- Safe water and improved sanitation
- Urbanization
- Poverty
- Employment
- Migration
- Consumption patterns
- Energy
- Gender equality
- Education

Session Objectives

- To present the issues of health within the context of development.
- To focus on health in all sectors of policy-making, combining the strengths of multiple stakeholders.
- To explore instruments that can be used to change health services are provided.

- To discuss the issue of achieving health equity and universal health coverage.
- To reinforce research and innovation in health as foundations for sustainable development.
- To explore new ways of collecting data that is disaggregated and relevant to the SDGs.

Key messages and next steps

- Achieving Goal 3 is crucial to achieving all other SDGs – good health is an essential requirement for sustainable growth, development, peace and hope for the future.
- Good health and well-being will be achieved by improving on other sectors that affect health directly or indirectly. For this reason, strong partnerships are needed and a Health in All Policies approach should be adopted.
- Scientific research, documentation and experience sharing are needed at country and regional levels.
- Timely, accurate and relevant disaggregated data is needed across the region.

Proposed Agenda

- Development of an implementation plan for the National SDGs and inclusion of Health targets, informed by proper situation analysis and evidence based prioritization.
- Establishment of multisectoral, interdisciplinary governance structure, to oversee the implementation and monitoring of national development plans.
- Ensuring proper financing (domestic and from ODA) for Goal 3 and health-related targets, based on realistic and quantifiable means.
- Developing and sustaining national capacities for compiling data and reporting on indicators; this includes strengthening national civil registration of vital statistics.
- Developing innovative strategies to implement developmental initiatives across countries in crisis.
- Devising policies and schemes in partnership with relevant stakeholders to harness the region's youth dividend, in order to improve on health related issues for future generations, and to maintain progress post 2030.