Progress report on the implementation of the 2001 Regional Health Promotion Strategy

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The aims of the strategy detailed in Resolution AFR/RC51/R4 are:

a) to advocate for increased awareness of and support for the use of health promotion across sectors;
b) to develop national strategies incorporating policy frameworks and actions plans;
c) to plan, implement and evaluate health promotion actions for intervening in disease-specific issues, population groups or settings; and
d) to mobilize resources by engaging new players such as civil society and public and private sectors.

Later World Health Assembly Resolutions, WHA42.44, WHA51.12 and WHA57.16 also called on Member States and WHO to give priority to strengthening health promotion actions. The Seventh Global Conference on Health Promotion was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 29–31 October, 2009. This conference adopted the Nairobi Call to Action that identifies key strategies and commitments urgently required for closing the implementation gap in health and development through health promotion.

In 2011, during the Sixty-first Session of the WHO Regional Committee in Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire, the African Region deliberated on the progress report regarding the implementation of the Regional Health Promotion Strategy in the African Region. The committee recommended updating of the existing strategy and to present it to the Sixty-second Session of the Regional Committee in 2012. The updated strategy was endorsed and a resulting resolution adopted advocating the need for a multisectoral approach involving individuals, families and communities, in successful health promotion strategies.

Progress made

Between 2007 and 2010, ten countries developed national health promotion strategic action plans and 10 countries received technical support in developing national health promotion policies. These policies and strategies are available for use by both health and non-health professionals, including civil society groups.

Implementation of health promotion activities in various settings was strengthened through the development of tools and guidelines. Several generic implementation guidelines for application in school health promotion and other community settings were developed in collaboration with regional experts. The main guidelines include focusing on health promotion planning, implementation and capacity building. Tools containing key strategies, principles and values for integrating health promotion actions were developed for maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

Capacity building workshops on the use of health promotion strategies and tools for noncommunicable diseases prevention and control were held in Ouidah, Benin, in 2007 and 2008 for 40 participants from 15 countries; in Entebbe, Uganda, in 2008 for 31 participants from eight countries and in Harare, Zimbabwe, for 32 participants from 12 countries in 2010. The workshops imparted content and skills on the application of health promotion strategies and tools to address health risk factors and key determinants.
of NCDs. Furthermore, the capacity of three academic institutions offering health promotion courses was enhanced through joint curriculum reviews. A generic health promotion course was developed with technical support from regional experts.

Partnership, alliances and networks for health promotion advocacy, resource mobilization and evidence gathering were enhanced at regional and country levels. Education International (EI) provided funding for five years to secondary school teachers to advocate for HIV/AIDS prevention and control in 25 countries. UNICEF, UNFPA, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Ford Foundation and USAID provided resources to support health promotion activities in ten countries.

To effectively support Member States to address disease risk factors and their determinants, the Regional Office established the Health Promotion Cluster in 2010 in line with the Strategic Directions for WHO AFRO 2010–2015 on “Achieving Sustainable Health Development in the African Region” to effectively support Member States.

The implementation of the regional health promotion strategy revealed several gaps and challenges. These are:

- weaknesses in leadership and the stewardship role of ministries of health in coordinating health promotion activities across sectors;
- low level of involvement of various players including civil society and communities in advocacy actions to regulate and legislate for good health governance;
- inadequate evidence regarding the effectiveness of health promotion;
- lack of a sustainable financing mechanism to support health promotion activities; and
- the need to build a critical mass of health promotion practitioners including at the community level.

**Next steps**

To effectively apply health promotion actions in response to the identified priority public health challenges facing countries of the WHO African Region, it is proposed to update the current regional strategy. Member States together with partners should:

- strengthen the leadership and stewardship role of the ministries of health to coordinate multisectoral actions within the primary health care context in order to address public health conditions existing outside the health sector;
- involve various players including civil society, private sector and communities to advocate for regulatory and legislative actions that seek to promote good health governance;
- monitor progress through evidence-based information and apply the findings to policies and programmes;
- establish innovative health promotion financing mechanisms e.g., dedicated taxes or special levies on tobacco or alcohol; and
- build a critical mass of health promotion practitioners at all levels through pre-service and in-service training, and continuing education.

The Regional Committee took note of this progress report and endorsed the proposed next steps.

In 2012, the Sixty-second session of the Regional Committee held in Luanda, Angola deliberated on the updated strategy. The strategy was endorsed and adopted. The updated strategy for health promotion in the WHO African Region places emphasis on the need for a multisectoral approach to address the risk factors and their determinants across priority public health conditions, and on the importance of participation of individuals, families and communities in the promotion of health.

**References**

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