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Multilateral agencies launch a joint plan to boost global health goals

04 October 2019 | News

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Recently at the United Nations General Assembly, 12 multilateral agencies launched a joint plan to better support countries over the next 10 years to accelerate progress towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Developed over 18 months, Stronger Collaboration, Better Health: Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All outlines how a dozen multilateral health, development and humanitarian agencies will collaborate to be more efficient and provide more streamlined support to countries to deliver universal health coverage and achieve the health-related SDG targets.

Healthy people are essential for sustainable development and for ending poverty, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies as well as protecting the environment. Over the last few decades, significant gains have been made in key areas of health, but the 2030 targets will not be met without redoubled efforts.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO said, “The plan is called, ‘Stronger Collaboration, Better Health’ for a reason. Although collaboration is the path, impact is the destination. The release of this plan is the beginning, not the end, of that path.”

Universal health coverage is key to meeting the health-related goals and addressing health inequities. If trends continue, up to 5 billion of the world’s population will not be covered by essential health services in 2030, as highlighted in the Universal Health Coverage: Global Monitoring Report, released last week by WHO. To leave no one behind, countries need to address health inequities. Improved collaboration and coordination can help countries tackle complex health challenges and bring innovative solutions.

Together, the 12 agencies contribute nearly one-third of all development assistance to health. Under the Global Action Plan, the agencies commit to strengthening their collaboration to:

- Engage with countries better to identify priorities, plan and implement together;
- Accelerate progress in countries through joint actions under 7 accelerator themes, which represent common challenges for many countries and where the agencies’ mandates, expertise and resources offer solutions, namely: 1) Primary health care 2) Sustainable health financing 3) Community and civil society engagement 4) Determinants of health 5) Innovative programming in fragile and vulnerable settings and for disease outbreak responses 6) Research and development, innovation and access, and 7) Data and digital health. They will also work together to advance gender equality and support the delivery of global public goods;
- Align by harmonizing their operational and financial strategies and policies in support of countries to increase efficiency and reduce the burden on countries; and
- Account, by reviewing progress and learning together to enhance shared accountability.

Governments are setting priorities, developing implementation plans and intensifying efforts to achieve the health-related SDG targets. Demand from countries for the Global Action Plan is growing.

Upendra Yadav, Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal said, “Achieving the health-related SDG goals is key for Nepal. Strengthening primary health care and enhancing data utilization for evidence-based planning and decision-making are two accelerators that will help bring us closer to achieving the SDG goals.”

Through the Global Action Plan, the agencies will help countries deliver on international commitments in addition to the SDGs, such as those made in Astana on primary health care and at the UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage this week in New York.

Coordinated by WHO, the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All, is in response to a call from Germany, Ghana and Norway, with support from the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, for more effective collaboration and coordination among global health organizations to achieve the health-related SDGs.

The 12 signatory agencies to the plan are Gavi, The GFF, the Global Fund, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNITAID, UN Women, World Bank Group, WFP and WHO.