

EDITORIAL

THE CHALLENGES OF ACHIEVING THE HEALTH MDGs IN THE AFRICAN REGION



During the last decade the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa has published the *African Health Monitor* twice a year. The *Monitor* has strived to present to its readers the overall strategic approaches of WHO Secretariat's actions in support to Member States and the most significant achievements resulting from both those actions and countries' efforts.

The year 2000 Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent the most important commitment and set of development objectives for the world, particularly in the area of health. Indeed, six of the eight MDGs deal with health to a greater or lesser extent, with three (MDGs 4, 5 and 6) focusing exclusively on health and a further three on specific aspects of health (underweight children, water and sanitation and essential medicines).

In 2008, the African countries adopted the Ouagadougou Declaration, the Algiers Declaration and the Libreville Declaration. Countries thus committed themselves to strengthen their health systems using the Primary Health Care approach; to strengthen their research for health, health information and knowledge management systems; and to take the necessary steps for effectively addressing the impact of the environment on health. The WHO Secretariat vowed to support Member States in their efforts according to its mandate, particularly by providing guidance and monitoring health situation and trends.

Readers will notice that we are welcoming the New Year with a new beginning – I am pleased to introduce this issue of the improved *African Health Monitor*. Some features have remained the same, others have changed.

The *Monitor* continues to be produced by the staff members of the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Africa, including those in Inter-country Support Teams, and WHO Country Offices throughout the Region. The focus is still on keeping the thousands of readers of this magazine throughout the world informed about recent developments and the evolution of activities in closing the knowledge gap in order to strengthen health systems and services and better deliver health to African populations.

This special issue of the *African Health Monitor* focuses on the MDGs: progress or challenges. Some papers discuss ways of strengthening the monitoring of progress on the health-related MDGs in the African Region. Others analyse the challenges in achieving the health MDGs in specific areas, such as monitoring implementation of child survival strategies, eliminating measles from the African Region, improving women's health, accelerating HIV prevention and control, malaria elimination, and the emergence of drug resistance to drugs used against HIV, tuberculosis and malaria.

The changes we have introduced will gradually become evident. The most obvious is that we have redesigned the

Monitor to make it more contemporary and lively. We have also instituted a peer review system to help boost the quality of articles. And we have converted the *Monitor* into a quarterly publication.

This magazine is a result of a collaborative effort, not only on the part of the editors and production personnel, but also the authors, who generally work as a team, collaborating on a paper relating to their work. Occasionally the co-authors may include non-WHO experts in the Region or elsewhere, who bring their specialized knowledge to bear on issue of significant Regional concern.

Finally, there is a new regular feature presenting the *Communicable Diseases Epidemiological Report*. While the present issue focuses on data and preparations for the H1N1 pandemic in the African Region, future issues will provide different feature articles, along with a regular epidemiological surveillance report on selected priority diseases.

The African Health Monitor can only continue to serve its purpose by the active participation of the staff (by submitting or reviewing papers) and readers (by sending their comments). Thus, I invite WHO staff members in the Region and all those interested in the magazine to submit their manuscripts.

We hope you will find this magazine of direct practical use and interest and welcome your comments and feedback.

LUIS GOMES SAMBO
REGIONAL DIRECTOR