

Health Rights Day in Uganda

A series of activities for Human Rights Day 2006 in Uganda were organised jointly by the Uganda Human Rights Commission and civil society organisations. For the first time in Uganda, human rights week included a Health Rights Day, spearheaded by the Uganda National Health Consumers' Organisation.

An alliance of health rights groups presented a petition on health financing to Parliament, followed by a procession,



drama, testimonies from individuals who have suffered human rights violations related to health,

and speeches by the Chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, and the WHO Health and Human Rights Officer. The day manifested the broad collaboration between partners in support of a human rights-based approach to health.

WHO Health and Human Rights support at country level

Since the posting of a Health and Human Rights Officer to Uganda, the WHO Country Office has initiated, supported and participated in various activities promoting the right to health.

"In the last year the partnership on health and human rights in Uganda has expanded, processes have been initiated and the interest and commitment of partners has grown."

- Annelie Rostedt, Health and Human Rights Officer, WCO Uganda

It is only since 2005-2006 that WHO has human rights officers placed in four country offices: Uganda, Mozambique, Vietnam, the West Bank and one Regional Office - Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO). Four out of five human rights officers are supported through the JPO programme. Sida funded the first such position in Uganda. The Belgian

government is funding the two positions in Mozambique and Vietnam, and the Finnish government is funding the fourth position at SEARO.

Awareness-raising on health and human rights

In Uganda, WHO works closely with the OHCHR country office. In May 2006 the two agencies supported the Ministry of Health in organizing a two-day capacity building workshop on health and human rights. The overall objective of the workshop was to explain the linkages between health and human rights and explore how human rights can be used as a tool for analysis, implementation and monitoring of the Health Sector Strategic Plan II. The workshop brought together a broad range of participants and created a strong momentum to carry forward the work.

Collaboration with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health

In March 2005 the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health ("right to health") carried out a country mission to Uganda focusing on neglected tropical diseases and the right to health. WHO and OHCHR worked closely with the Special Rapporteur in support of this mission. The work of the Special Rapporteur has provided valuable guidance to the WHO activities implemented in Uganda and is a good example of how the recommendations of a Special Rapporteur can be used in the formulation and implementation of programmes.

Institutionalising health and human rights

WHO has supported both the Ministry of Health and the Uganda Human Rights Commission in institutionalising their health and human rights activities. Following the health and human rights workshop, a Health and Human Rights Team was formed under the aegis of the

Department of Planning, Ministry of Health. The Team includes representatives of various Ministry of Health departments, civil society organisations, the Uganda Human Rights Commission and UN agencies, including OHCHR and WHO. As recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, the Uganda Human Rights Commission is in the process of establishing a right-to-health unit that will be responsible for monitoring policies, programmes and projects on the right to health with a particular focus on neglected diseases. The establishment of the right-to-health unit was discussed at the health and human rights workshop and WHO has continued to support the Uganda Human Rights Commission in the development of a proposal.

Integration of Human Rights in Humanitarian Action

In Uganda, there is both a development context in most of the country, and a humanitarian context in the conflict affected Northern Uganda, where internally displaced people constitute the majority of the population.

Are you surprised that WHO is supporting a study on the right to health and a human rights based approach? - As a UN specialised agency WHO has a responsibility to promote and protect human rights in the area of health.

- Dr. Melville George, WHO Representative

WHO has initiated a health and human rights study in two of the conflict affected districts. The study addresses the views of communities and health providers in relation to health rights; the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of services; human rights principles and gender equality. The study will encourage more responsive health interventions based on community participation and feed-back.

The comparative advantage of WHO in supporting the integration of health and human rights in the health sector

The UN Secretary General's reform agenda in the area of Human Rights ("Action 2") puts a strong emphasis on UN support to country-level efforts of Member States in establishing and strengthening national human rights promotion and protection systems. WHO can play an important role in supporting the integration of human rights in policy and development programme planning within the health sector. WHO can put the right to health and a human rights-based approach to health on the agenda, owing to its close working relationship with both the Ministry of Health and other partners. WHO can also play a crucial role in supporting interaction between Ministries of Health and civil society on issues of health and human rights. WHO is uniquely positioned to support human rights sensitization and awareness-raising and build the capacity of partners to address health from a human rights perspective.

WHO has given us an opportunity to work with the Ministry of Health. We did not have this possibility before and it has really benefited our work.

- Civil Society partner

The experiences that WHO has gained at country level are feeding into the global health and human rights activities and strategic work of WHO, and provide best practices to be shared with other country offices and partners.