

PMNCH UPDATE- PRESS RELEASE



THE PARTNERSHIP
For Maternal, Newborn & Child Health

London-June 16 2006- The UK Secretary of State- the Rt. Hon Hilary Benn - debates health of poor countries with leading figures from global health: Dr Francisco Songane and Dr Fared Abdullah.



A debate --Quick Wins versus Strengthening Health Systems-- took place on Thursday, 15 June 2006 at the London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, between the Secretary of State of the United Kingdom, the Rt. Hon Hilary Benn, Dr Francisco Songane, Director of the Partnership for Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health and ex-

Minister of Health from Mozambique, and Dr Fared Abdullah, Director of Technical Support at the International HIV/AIDS Alliance.

As well, DFID released a Maternal Health Progress Report, making the United Kingdom the first western donor country to produce a Maternal Health Progress Report and examines the global efforts led by the UK to achieve the maternal health Millennium Development Goal.

(<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/maternal-health-progress-report.pdf>)

Mr Benn called for the World Bank and World Health Organisation to start work on building a clear international approach to 10-year health plans for developing countries. "The past five years have seen a major effort on diseases such as TB, HIV/AIDS and Malaria. We now need a similar effort to deliver better basic healthcare, including more midwives, doctors, nurses, clinics, and drugs.

(<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/Speeches/healthcare-promises.asp>)

Dr. Songane called for system strengthening, as it brings the longest-term gain, and a comprehensive approach to aid and development, through flexible financing mechanisms led by the individual countries: "In my experience in Mozambique, time that should have been spent on service provision was wasted because the Ministry of Health had to meet separate demands from multiple partners for numerous advisory groups and monitoring reports, " said Dr Songane. The experience in Mozambique led Dr Songane, as then-Minister of Health- to devise a mechanism of co-ordination with rules of engagement led by the government.

Dr Songane urged a comprehensive approach to aid and development, through flexible financing mechanisms with country leadership. "Global Health partnerships should work towards embedding important issues that need focus within the existing systems that need strengthening," said Dr Songane.

Dr Songane also lauded the first donor progress report on Maternal Health Strategy from a donor country. "It acknowledges the primary importance of making maternal health a priority in the building of health systems. We need other donors to follow this example. We all need developing countries to prioritize the continuum of care and maternal and child health in their national health and financial plans."

Dr Abdullah agreed that it would be a mistake to pit quick wins against health systems strengthening, and added that thinking of AIDS interventions as a separate issue would be a major error because of the scale of the disease. In his own province in South Africa, he added, it was estimated that AIDS-related illness would account for 25% of hospital admissions and 23% of primary care visits by 2010.

'Strengthening pharmacy systems and the supply chain for ARVs will [also] have a huge spin off for the common chronic diseases (hypertension, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, arthritis, psychiatric disease) which account for as much as 50% of all primary healthcare visits in the Western Cape setting,' said Dr Abdullah.

The panellists were questioned on a number of key issues relating to global health, such as how deaths from diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria were going to be tackled, the human resources crisis affecting many health systems in low-income countries, health inequalities and barriers to health, and supporting emerging ministries of health in post-conflict countries.

Related links:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/maternal-health-progress-report.pdf>

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/pressreleases/long-term-health-plans.asp>

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/Speeches/healthcare-promises.asp>

<http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/news/2006/hbennvisit.html>

<http://www.pmnch.org/>

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