Maldives

Enabling environment – policies and strategies to support the information society

The Maldives reports that the majority of the listed actions to promote an enabling environment for information and communication technologies (ICT) in the health sector are expected to commence by 2008. Regulations to protect the privacy and security of individual patient data where eHealth is used are considered very effective, and are likely to continue over the next two years. The recognition of cultural diversity through the provision of information in local languages has been slightly effective and may continue. To date, a decision remains to be made as to which of the remaining listed actions will be introduced by 2008. Although the Maldives highlights the introduction of telemedicine in four regional hospitals in addition to the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé as a significant measure, it notes that access to and use of the project has been limited so far. The most significant challenge is physical access. Patients needing specialized care must be referred to one of the central, regional or atoll hospitals that provide specialized medical services; the referral system is complicated and costly due to the geography of the country and the limited public sea-transport system.

Infrastructure – access to information and communication technologies

A national plan for the development of ICT in health, which sets targets for health sector connectivity, was introduced in 2003 and is reported to be slightly effective. The implementation in 2003 of a national policy to reduce the costs of ICT infrastructure for the health sector is rated as moderately effective. Both actions are likely to be reviewed and continued over the next two years. Intersectoral and nongovernmental cooperation is likely to continue as well. The establishment of telecommunications companies to develop and improve networks and accessibility to all the regions and to most of the islands with public hospitals is reported as another important action in this field. Among the most effective actions in building ICT infrastructure for the health sector is the installation of telephone lines, fax machines and mobile telephone networks for the sharing of data and information between hospitals, the Department of Public Health and the Ministry of Health. The most significant challenge in this area is the reported need to build capacity of staff across the health system.

Cultural and linguistic diversity, and cultural identity

The Maldives plans to introduce special projects to promote the development and use of new electronic health content in multiple languages by 2008. The translation and cultural adaptation of existing high-quality content (created either locally or abroad) is rated as slightly effective and likely to continue.
Content – access to information and knowledge

Health professionals have access to online health content through international and national electronic journals in the Maldives. These services are rated as extremely effective and are predicted to continue over the next two years. The Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI), introduced in 2005, is mentioned as an extremely effective advance in this area. A policy for a digital national open archive for scientific research, published within the Maldives, was implemented in 2001. This is reported to be a moderately effective action likely to continue. Creating and providing health information for the general public in electronic format is described as a slightly effective service that is expected to be reviewed and continued. The Maldives highlights the need to strengthen the network of the National Library, and the libraries of the Ministry of Health and the Faculty of Health Sciences. Raising awareness among health professionals of the potential of these resources is reported as a significant challenge.

Capacity – human resources knowledge and skills

ICT skills courses as a part of university curricula for health sciences students have been offered since 2002 and are rated as moderately effective. ICT skills programmes in the ongoing training of health-care professionals were introduced in 2003 and are rated as slightly effective. The Maldives also offers health sciences courses through eLearning for health professionals in training and practice. All these actions are planned to continue over the next two years. Insufficient Internet connectivity and the high costs related to it are described as significant challenges to build ICT capacity in the health sector.

eHealth tools and eHealth services

The majority of the listed eHealth tools are rated as very useful if the World Health Organization could offer these as generic prototypes for adaptation to the Maldives. The majority of the specified eHealth services are also considered very useful.