Conference of Ministers of Finance and Health

Session 2: Seizing the Demographic Dividend Now: A One-Time Opportunity for Africa

Date: 04 July 2012
Time: 11:00-12:00
Venue: Tunis, Tunisia

SESSION AIM

Engage finance and health ministers in a discussion on the demographic dividend and the need to focus on reproductive health and family planning.

BACKGROUND

With 1 billion people in Africa today and 2.3 billion people projected for 2050, the continent’s greatest asset, or potential risk in the coming decade, will be in its capacity to harness this rapidly increasing reservoir of human capital. After Asia, Africa is the world’s largest and most populous continent and accounts for about 15% of the world’s population. Africa is also the youngest region in the world – in 2011, the top 10 countries with the youngest population were in Africa. By 2040, Africa will have the largest workforce in the world, surpassing China and India. Within the continent, East & West Africa will be the youngest regions. A large “youth bulge” can be an opportunity for change, progress and social dynamism or a risk for the continent. It offers endless opportunities for economic and social development, if the talents of this rising youth cohort are harnessed and channelled towards the productive sectors of the economy.

Although the demographic dividend provides huge opportunities for economic and social development, at the same time, there is a need to scale up reproductive health and family planning services. Family planning has generally been neglected on the continent, and has not necessarily received the same degree of attention and resources which has been applied to other parts of the health agenda. This is despite the fact that the evidence shows strong correlations between contraceptive use and reductions in child and maternal mortality. The Sub-Saharan Africa region has the highest level of fertility in the world and the unmet need for family planning is correspondingly very high. In the past 40 years, the average number of births per woman (Total Fertility Rate) has shown only a modest decline from 6.8 in 1967 to 5.1 in 2007. Improvements in family planning use can accelerate the attainment of MDG goals for maternal and child mortality reduction. Allowing families to choose the numbers and spacing of children can also free up family resources for education and other important family needs, thus improving the human capital of the next generation.

There is growing recognition in the international community and at the country level of the need to scale-up family planning and reproductive health services. Speakers will discuss the challenges and what can be done in the light of experience in Africa and relate this to successful efforts in other regions of the world.
KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS

- What is the experience to date at the international and country levels?
- What are the most promising tools and what are the challenges?
- What is the role of civil society and the private sector?
- How can best practice be shared amongst countries, and which agencies can assist?

CHAIRS & SPEAKERS

Chair: Hon. Walter Gwenigale, Minister of Health, Liberia
Co-Chair: Hon. Majozi Vincent Sithole, Minister of Finance, Swaziland

Dr. Eliya Zulu, Executive Director, African Institute of Development Policy (10 Mins)
Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA (10 mins)
Hon. Lucien Bembamba, Minister of Finance, Burkina Faso (10 mins)
Rachel Turner, Director, East and Central Africa, DFID (10 min)
Dr Olawale Maiyegun, Director, Social Affairs Department, African Union (10 mins)