

Media Brief on SEAPACOH

For Release: Tuesday, September 27, 2011

In East and Southern Africa, access to health care is inadequate and inequitable, posing further challenges to addressing health burdens in the region. Governments in the region have promised to dedicate 15% of their domestic budgets to health, and while progress is being made towards this across many countries in the region, few countries in Africa have met this goal. Our governments have also pledged to ensure reproductive health services for all people to reduce maternal death and ill-health, yet every year, thousands of women die in childbirth and family planning services are often unavailable.

Parliaments can and do play a key role in promoting health and health equity through their representative, legislative and oversight roles, including budget oversight. There are a number of documented examples of how these roles have been exercised in Eastern and Southern Africa to prioritise health in budgets, to monitor the performance of the executive, to strengthen laws protecting health and to keep the need to redress inequity in health and to promote sexual and reproductive health high on the public agenda.

About SEAPACOH

The Southern and Eastern African Parliamentary Alliance of Committees of Health (SEAPACOH) is a network of parliamentary committees on health, HIV/AIDS and on equity in health drawn from countries in Southern and Eastern Africa.

The alliance works to enhance the effectiveness of the committees in addressing issues of inequity in health, HIV/AIDS, family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) through policy, resource allocation, budgetary oversight and legislative oversight.

The Southern and Eastern African Parliamentary Alliance of Committees of Health (SEAPACOH) is having a regional meeting on the theme “Repositioning Family Planning and Reproductive Health in Africa: Lessons Learnt, Challenges and Opportunities.” The meeting is at the Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala, Uganda from 27-29 September 2011. The meeting is being organized by the Partners in Population and Development Africa Regional Office (PPD ARO) in collaboration with the Southern and Eastern African Parliamentary Alliance of Committees on Health (SEAPACOH) and is supported by USAID through the Health Policy Project, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the Advance Family Planning Project.

The purpose of the meeting is to promote information exchange, facilitate policy dialogue and identify key areas of follow up action to reposition family planning and reproductive health in the Eastern and Southern Africa region.

The participants at the meeting will be parliamentarians who sit on Parliamentary Committees of Health, senior government officials, representatives of civil society organizations, development partners and other important stakeholders engaged in family planning, reproductive health and maternal health programmes.

The SEAPACOH membership countries are: Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

The countries attending this 2011 meeting of SEAPACOH are: Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

History of SEAPACOH

SEAPACOH was formed following a meeting organized by the Eastern and Southern African Regional Network for Equity in Health (EQUINET), Global Equity Gauge Alliance (GEGA) and the SADC Parliamentary Forum and held in August 2003 in Johannesburg to exchange information on the work done by parliamentary committees on health, HIV/AIDS and on equity in health. Follow-up meetings were held in January 2005 in Zambia,

The 2008 Regional Meeting of Parliamentary Committees on Health in East and Southern Africa was held at Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda, from 16-18 September 2008. This meeting gathered members of Parliamentary committees responsible for health from twelve countries in East and Southern Africa, with sixteen technical, government and civil society and regional partners to promote information exchange, facilitate policy dialogue and identify key areas of follow up action to advance health equity and sexual and reproductive health in the region. This high-level meeting was hosted by PPD ARO in partnership with the Regional Network for Equity in Health in East and Southern Africa (EQUINET), the African Population Health Research Centre (APHRC), Venture Strategies for Health and Development, the German Foundation for World Population (DSW), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Southern and East African Parliamentary Alliance of Committees of Health (SEAPACOH).

From 6-9 April 2009, PPD ARO held a workshop for SEAPACOH to develop and adopt its Strategic Plan. The workshop was attended by 22 participants (both steering committee members and technocrats). The output of the workshop was a SEAPACOH Strategic Plan (2009 – 2013) to guide SEAPACOH's work as well as its resource mobilization efforts.

On 21 September 2009, PPD ARO, the Regional Network for Equity in Health in East and Southern Africa (EQUINET) and the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) organized a follow up meeting with SEAPACOH for the parliamentarians to report back on progress made over the past year, as well as to promote information exchange, facilitate policy dialogue and identify key areas of follow up action to advance health equity and sexual and reproductive health in the region.

From 28-29 September 2010, PPD ARO in collaboration with partners (UNFPA, DSW, AFIDEP) organized its third regional meeting with SEAPACOH on the theme ““Repositioning Family Planning and Reproductive Health in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region: Challenges and Opportunities” in Kampala, Uganda. The meeting participants were Chairpersons (or their designates) of Parliamentary Committees on health and their Committee Clerks, other selected parliamentarians, as well representatives of development partners, NGOs, Civil Society

and other important stakeholders engaged in family planning, reproductive health and maternal health programmes.

Vision, Mission, and Objectives of SEAPACOH

The objective of the network is to build a more consistent collaboration of the Parliamentary Committees on Health in East and Southern Africa towards achieving individual and regional goals of health equity and effective responses to HIV/AIDS.

According to its strategic plan (2009-2013), SEAPACOH's vision is "Health for all as a fundamental human right."

Its mission is "To provide consistent collaboration of the Parliamentary Committees on Health in the ESA Region in their representational, legislative, budgetary processes including appropriation and oversight roles to achieve health for all."

Its three (3) main areas of focus for the period 2009-2013 are:

1. Ensuring needs-based resourcing of the health sector;
2. Ensuring effective domestication, implementation and compliance with agreed upon commitments in the health sector by governments; and
3. Ensuring sustainability of the Alliance.

The alliance works in close collaboration amongst its members and make links with other parliamentary committees and networks important for health to address specific objectives focusing on attainment of the goal of nurturing a culture of health as a basic human right for all the people of the member countries. Strong linkages with other partners at national, regional and international level include PPD ARO, EQUINET, as well as a number of international and national IGOs and NGOs.

The network aims to strengthen the role of parliaments in the areas of oversight of budgets, review of legislation, policy oversight and providing leadership in priority areas of public health and health equity, strengthening health promotion, strengthening public participation and oversight, and building leadership for achieving goals of equity in health and effective responses to HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases important to the region.

More Information

More information on SEAPACOH, including presentations from previous meetings, is available online at: <http://ppdafrica.org/index.php/en/programs/policydialog/parliamentarymeetings>

Photographs from current and previous meetings are online at:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ppdafrica/>

The SEAPACOH Strategic Plan is available at:
<http://ppdafrica.org/docs/2009SEAPACOH/SEAPACOHstrategicplan.pdf>

2010 Kampala meeting:

Resolutions: <http://ppdafrica.org/docs/SEAPACOH2010/resolutions.pdf>

Report: <http://ppdafrica.org/docs/SEAPACOH2010/report.pdf>

2009 Kampala meeting:

Resolutions: <http://ppdafrica.org/docs/2009SEAPACOH/finalcommitments.pdf>

Report: <http://ppdafrica.org/docs/2009SEAPACOH/report.pdf>

2008 Kampala meeting:

Resolutions: <http://ppdafrica.org/docs/ParliamentResolutionsSEP08.pdf>

Report: <http://ppdafrica.org/docs/parliamentreportsep08.pdf>

Information on previous SEAPACOH meetings since 2003 is available at EQUINET's website:
<http://www.equinafrica.org>.

2011 Meeting Organizers

Partners in Population and Development (PPD) is a Southern-led, Southern-run inter-governmental organization of 25 developing countries, encompassing more than half the population of the entire globe. PPD was founded in 1995, to promote South-South cooperation in reproductive health and population and development. **The Partners in Population and Development Africa Regional Office (PPD ARO)** is based in Kampala, Uganda. The vision of the PPD ARO is —an African continent that meets its Reproductive Health needs, promotes the Population and Development agenda and thereby addresses poverty, through South-South Cooperation. Its mission is —to provide a platform for the promotion of and resource mobilization for Reproductive Health, Population and Development in Africa through three elements: 1) Policy dialogue 2) Networking and building strategic partnerships in the region and 3) Sharing of experiences and good practices. More information is available online at: www.ppdafrica.org; Email: aro@ppdafrica.org

Alliance of Committees of Health (SEAPACOH) is a network of Parliamentary Committees on Health in Southern and Eastern Africa. The objective of the network is to build a more consistent collaboration of the Parliamentary Committees on Health towards achieving individual and regional goals of health equity and effective responses to HIV and AIDS. The network aims to strengthen the role of Parliaments in the areas of oversight of budgets, review of legislation, policy and providing leadership for achieving goals of equity in health and effective responses to HIV/ AIDS, TB, Malaria and other diseases important to the region.