

RBM Partnership Board Chair Calls for a Redoubling of Efforts to End Malaria in South East Asia

The RBM Partnership Board Chair Dr Winnie Mpanju-Shumbusho represented the Partnership at the [70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for South East Asia](#) held in Maldives, from 6-10 September 2017. The meeting was attended by Ministers and other senior officials from health and other sectors, WHO Director General and Regional Director for South East Asia region, as well as partners, including RBM Partnership, Stop TB Partnership and the Global Fund.

During her remarks at the Ministerial Roundtable and side events, Dr Mpanju-Shumbusho commended the successes achieved by the South-East Asia region in the fight to end malaria, including the laudable victories of Maldives and Sri Lanka who were certified malaria-free in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

She stressed the need for sustaining the gains and intensifying efforts as malaria remains endemic in nine out of 11 countries in the region; with multi-drug resistance remaining a significant threat, and domestic funding for malaria prevention and control declining.

Dr Mpanju-Shumbusho underlined the need for accelerating efforts towards attaining the malaria goals contained in the WHO Global Technical Strategy 2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through reinforcing political commitment (recognising that malaria is an impediment to economic development); ensuring universal coverage of core interventions; increasing international and domestic financing; and massive efforts at community level.

She highlighted the new RBM Partnership Operational Strategy for 2017-2020 and its three pillars, namely: 1) Keeping malaria high on the global agenda to ensure continued commitment and investment; 2) Establishing regional approaches anchored in existing political and economic platforms such as regional economic communities to accelerate progress and impetus for malaria elimination; 3) Increasing the global and domestic financing envelopes for malaria.

Dr Mpanju-Shumbusho underlined the multi-sectoral importance of a malaria-free society, as investment in human capital leads to healthier, more productive, and more resilient societies. Combatting malaria translates directly to wider social and economic development outcomes and will ensure progress towards meeting the SDGs.

She noted that because malaria is both a major cause and consequence of global poverty and inequity, investing in quality and effective malaria programmes means investing heavily in the most vulnerable – especially women, girls and children – as well as in other vulnerable populations such as migrants, refugees and displaced populations, including those affected by climate related disasters.

Updating the Health Ministers and delegates on the RBM Partnership, Dr Mpanju-Shumbusho highlighted that the multi-sector and multi-partner mandate has allowed the Partnership to act as a strategic advisor and partner to assist Global Fund grant processes from formulation to implementation, including acting as an information hub and helping to develop successful advocacy strategies that involve a wide spectrum of policy reforms and innovations.

She added that as several countries in Asia are on the cusp of eliminating malaria, the RBM Partnership will work with partners in the region to advocate for and provide implementation support to national

malaria elimination strategies. Countries that have reached or are close to elimination status represent a model for others to learn from and emulate as the world progresses towards the 2020 milestone and 2030 SDG agenda.

Dr Mpanju-Shumbusho outlined the new RBM structure, including its three Main Partner Committees, namely Advocacy and Resource Mobilization, Strategic Communications, and the Regional and Country Support, noting that it aligns itself fully with the agenda for malaria elimination in Asian countries.

For example, the Regional and Country Support Partner Committee provided in-country expertise to support the Global Fund malaria application submissions to secure grants for the 2018-2020 period, whereby countries from all five WHO regions have received support. Of the 52 countries that submitted their malaria applications in April and May 2017, 49 are currently in the grant making process and three are under re-consideration by the Global Fund's Technical Review Panel.

Dr Mpanju-Shumbusho underscored to the delegates that a malaria-free region and a malaria free world are possible. Through strong political commitment, integrated strategies seeking to reach the unreached; and readiness to harness the power of cutting-edge tools, the burden of malaria can be ended.

The RBM Partnership will continue to support national and international leadership efforts to secure sufficient and accessible financial resources for ending malaria, thus saving lives, ensuring healthier and more productive societies in all partner countries, and catalysing attainment of the SDGs.

Other key highlights from the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for South East Asia

Building health systems resilient to climate change, vector control, anti microbial resistance, improving access to essential medicines for all and intensifying efforts to end malaria, tuberculosis and hepatitis by 2030 were among the key agenda items that were discussed. Strengthening primary health care and the health workforce and progress towards universal health coverage were also prioritized, reflecting the region's drive to achieve the SDG for health.

In addition, Ministers and partners discussed ways to strengthen inter-country cooperation in areas such as medicines procurement and pricing, and regulation of medical products, as well as ways to enhance appropriate use of medicines, including antibiotics and antimalarials. The meeting also deliberated on the actions needed end tuberculosis, malaria and strengthen vector control.

The meeting adopted the Ministerial Declaration entitled a "Framework for Action on Building Health Systems Resilience to Climate Change", stressing that a well prepared and responsive health system is crucial for preventing and minimizing the increasing health risks posed by climate change.

The meeting stressed the critical need for countries in the South-East Asia Region to strengthen primary health care – including the skills of frontline health workers – and enhance monitoring of health services coverage and financial protection as they strive to achieve the SDG on health and wellbeing for all.

By reviving and adapting frontline services and health workers to meet today's needs, countries can accelerate public health gains, including ending communicable diseases, including malaria; reducing maternal and child mortality and strengthening health security; and also tackle looming challenges such as the increased burden of noncommunicable diseases.