

A new ECA Report proposes ways to mainstream health equity in the development agenda

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Addis Ababa Ethiopia, 22 April 2009 (ECA) – Equity-focused policies and programmes can curb infant mortality, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, says a new report released by the African Centre for Gender and Social Development of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

“Mainstreaming health equity into the development agenda in Africa” is an assessment of how health inequities are addressed in ten African countries including: Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, Malawi, Egypt, Morocco, Chad and Cameroon. “One of the most constraining inequities is unfair systematic differences in accessing and utilizing health services between different socio-economic groups”, reads the report.

While showing some progress in some countries, this report underscores with great concern that none of the countries studied have met the Declaration commitment of 15% of total government expenditure allocated to health. In this respect, the report warns that progress in the health-related MDGs will remain slow unless health equity is clearly mainstreamed in the national development plans or Poverty reduction strategies.

Based on the findings reported in the study, urgent actions are advocated including:

- Setting up cross-government committee on health equity and setting clear goals for each sector of the national economy
- Strengthening the institutional framework to support greater integration of health equity into health sector plans.
- Expanding health services to rural and remote areas
- Integrating equity concerns into economic growth strategies
- Ensuring equitable allocation of national resources including to health and
- Promoting policy dialogue on health equity between the UN bodies, the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities.

Background

“Mainstreaming health equity into the development agenda in Africa” is timely as the next ECOSOC high-level meeting scheduled in July 2009 in Geneva will focus on health equity as part of global efforts towards improving health care. Several international commitments including the Alma-Ata Declaration, the Africa Health Strategy and the MDGs pledge to make health equity a key focus of development plans and poverty reduction strategy. In this regard, the report released by ECA provides a strong evidence base for policy formulation and for resource allocation. The analysis contained in this study uses data from the demographic and health surveys of the ten countries covered by the report.

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