

Joint Statement MoPH – WHO – UNICEF

World Health Day, Afghanistan - 7 April 2010

CONTEXT

The population living in urban areas is expected to grow, requiring urban health to become a major focus of public health policy. While the growth of cities is associated with increasing prosperity and good health in general, urban populations demonstrate some of the worst health disparities. Rapid migration from rural areas as well as natural population growth is putting further pressure on limited resources in cities. A substantial proportion of urban dwellers live in slum areas, which are often overcrowded and characterized by poor living conditions. If cities fail to deliver economic opportunities for the poor, large concentrations of economically disadvantaged are likely to threaten social stability and the health of a larger community. Disparities risk to increase if the combination of migration, growth and scarcity of resources results in cities being unable to provide basic social services needed by all.

Also, poorly planned or unplanned urbanization patterns have negative consequences for the health and safety of urban dwellers. This includes enhanced risk factors for heart disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung diseases - such as physical inactivity and unhealthy diets and communicable diseases, but also an increased risk of road traffic injuries.

Improved coordination is required among national and sub- national efforts in tackling health challenges in urban areas, including but not limited to education, agriculture, environment and transport, with the understanding that such action requires the collaboration of various partners, including civil society and private sector.

Poverty alleviation and human development must be based on the individual and the principal that health is at the core of each human being and the societal development process as such

To improve the social determinants of health and empower urban communities across the country, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) are committed to:

1. Support the Government of Afghanistan in establishing an inter-sectoral national committee to address Urban Health issues with membership from key line ministries including MoPH, Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Public welfare, Ministry of Education, Kabul Municipality, National Environmental Protection Authority (NEPA), Independent Administration of the local governments, and UN agencies including but not limited to WHO and UNICEF. This committee will specifically work on the following five points of action to build a healthy and safe urban environment:
 - *Promote urban planning for healthy behavior and safety.*
 - *Improve urban living conditions.*
 - *Ensure participatory urban governance.*
 - *Build inclusive cities that are accessible and age- friendly.*
 - *Make urban areas resilient to emergencies and disasters.*

2. Support the Ministry of Urban Development (MURD), Water & Sewerage Authority and Municipality in proper planning and maintenance to keep drinking water safe and underground water free from contamination.

3. Support the MoPH, through technical support, advocacy and policy dialogue with other sectors to promote “Health -in- All policies”.

4. Promote wide range of public awareness on urban health issues such as city and environmental cleaning; water, sanitation, hygiene, food safety, air pollution, waste management, healthy diet and physical activity.

5. Promote the concept of healthy cities, with the focus to tackle inequalities that exist in the health system of a city and provide a healthy environment for all, placing health on the development agenda and engaging all actors, in a dialogue for change. The aim is to ensure that cities have a clean and sustainable environment, provide preventive and curative health services to all, and target marginalized and impoverished populations.

Signed by:

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