



PUBLIC HEALTH IN AFRICA

MULTIPLE AND ONGOING CHALLENGES



This programme, intended for Ministers of Health and their closest experts and advisers, aims to contribute to a better knowledge of the major public health issues on the African continent and to enable stakeholders in the field to better orient the strategies needed to create access for all to quality health care.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN AFRICA

In the medical field, the essential characteristic of Africa is that, in addition to the difficulty of access to health care and the lack of human resources, it must also deal with the epidemiological problems of the past and those of the future.

There are numerous emergencies:

- the eradication of endemic diseases such as AIDS (26 million people living with HIV in Africa out of a total of 36 million worldwide), malaria (90% of malaria cases occur in Africa), Ebola or tuberculosis
- the lack of basic health care makes diarrhoea and pneumonia the leading cause of child mortality
- acute or chronic malnutrition leads to brain damage in the first 1,000 days of life (more than 4 out of 10 children in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from it)
- the fight against genetic diseases such as sickle cell disease
- the fight against the development of non-communicable diseases (diabetes, cancer) which are increasing at an alarming rate and represent a major challenge for prevention and treatment
- the introduction of specific policies dedicated to mental health



New challenges are constantly emerging:

- an increasing number of cancer cases are the result of chronic infections such as Hepatitis B and C
- the mortality rate is already the highest in the world
- studies predict 1.2 million new cases of cancer in Africa by 2030 and more than 970,000 deaths if nothing is done in terms of prevention

THE ASSESSMENT

This morbidity, the glaring lack of qualified health professionals and the chronic lack of financial resources dedicated to public health explain why Africa has the worst mortality indicators in the world!

One of the urgent needs is to help countries think about how to organise their health systems, which remains within their sovereignty. However, this field can benefit from effective bilateral cooperation.

Indeed, while major organisations such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation (GAVI), UNITAID, the Clinton Foundation or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are present and play an important role in improving health indicators, *they can in no way change or improve health systems themselves.*

It is also important to point out that a number of African countries are affected by armed conflicts that aggravate the health situation by disrupting already fragile and inefficient health systems. The same is true of population displacements and violence against health workers, NGOs and the general population.

In addition, one of the greatest challenges facing Africa in the near future will be the phenomenon of climate migration.

SUGGESTED POINTS FOR THE AGENDA

THE PUBLIC HEALTH FRAMEWORK IN AFRICA

1. Access to preventive care and treatment for all is the major public health challenge
2. Improving access to quality services at affordable costs and in an equitable manner is a priority



3. Adapting public health resources to climate issues and environmental degradation is an emerging necessity
4. How can the chronic shortage of human and financial resources be remedied?
5. Africa is not a special case: an epidemic like Ebola is far from being a purely African threat and the world must take steps to safeguard itself through increased regional and international cooperation

PUBLIC HEALTH IN EVERYDAY LIFE

1. A priority: to reduce the very high mortality rates of mothers and children
2. Prevention Education - towards a better match between education and health messages
3. Combating the increase in non-communicable diseases such as diabetes
4. Support for people in vulnerable circumstances: disability, the elderly and migrants
5. The necessary struggle against the misuse of resources made available to communities

PUBLIC HEALTH IN A CRISIS

1. Organising emergency prevention and management: how to stop the spread of epidemics in West Africa?
2. Regional cooperation is the only powerful and modern response to health challenges in Africa
3. Ways to strengthen cooperation between States to address emerging and re-emerging diseases
4. Improve warning systems and contain emerging epidemics
5. Coordinate the role of foreign states and international organisations

PUBLIC HEALTH AND NATURAL DISASTERS

1. The creation and use of joint means of intervention
2. How can cross-border cooperation be improved?
3. Towards an intensified role for Regional Organisations



TOWARD A FIRST INITIATIVE: “UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE COVERAGE”



This is the only solution in order to:

- reduce the worst of inequalities, that related to health. Too many poor people do not have access to basic health care from qualified health professionals (doctors, nurses, midwives, etc.)
- change the fact that only patients who are of interest to the international community have access to preventive services and treatment, while the majority of others, sick and poor, suffer from indifference and death
- reduce mortality rates of mothers and children
- enable the most vulnerable groups to have access to care: women, children, people living with HIV, people suffering from mental illness or in need of palliative care

It is only by developing basic health care that it will be possible to move towards a real generalised public health policy. But we must also encourage prevention, the mother of all public health disciplines.

This necessarily requires the establishment of a minimum health organisation based in particular on regional dialogue, which has not been sufficiently promoted so far.

While each country must move forward with its own initiatives, taking into account its own culture and priorities, a regional dynamic can make a significant contribution to the success of these initiatives, particularly in terms of training for professionals.



TOWARD A SECOND INITIATIVE: **DEVELOP TELEMEDICINE**



Beyond the stage of basic health care, which is a major pillar of any public health policy, telemedicine can play an important role in African countries suffering from a shortage of specialist doctors thanks to new communication technologies.

If Africa has few health professionals and lacks sophisticated equipment, telemedicine represents the solution of the future because it will make it possible to skip the intermediate stage by allowing immediate access to quality diagnosis.

This will enable any patient who is far from a large hospital to obtain a rapid diagnosis, established by the best medical teams, without having to travel to a far-off centre.

Telemedicine will therefore revolutionise health care in a continent like Africa.