

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA

P. O. Box 3243

Tele: +251-11-5517 700

Fax: +251-11-5517844

Website: www.au.int

**SIXTH SESSION OF AFRICAN UNION CONFERENCE
OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
22-26 APRIL 2013**

***THEME:* The Impact of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Neglected
Tropical Diseases (NTD) on Development in Africa**

CONCEPT NOTE

A. BACKGROUND

i. Introduction

The Statutory Sessions of the AU Conference of Ministers of Health are convened every two years. The last Ordinary Session (5th Session) was held in Windhoek, Namibia in April 2011 under the theme: “*The Impact of Climate Change on Health and Development in Africa*”. The theme was selected because climate change has profound adverse effects on some of the most fundamental social determinants of health such as food, air, and water and on re-emergence of diseases that are hitherto under control. The 5th session focused on the major impact of climate change on health in Africa and supported strong actions to mitigate the impact of climate change and avoid further dramatic and potentially disastrous impacts on health.

The Sixth Conference of AU Ministers of Health shall be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 22nd to 26th April 2013 with the theme “***The Impact of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) on Development in Africa***”. The theme is inspired by Part 2 of the Africa Health Strategy 2007-2015, particularly, paragraphs 6-8. Paragraph 6, inter alia states: “Nonetheless, the reality remains that Africa’s people face a huge burden of preventable and treatable health problems whose solutions are known, proportionately far beyond Africa’s share of the world’s population. The triple burden from communicable and non-communicable diseases and injury and trauma, including the social impact of these, has adversely affected development in Africa”. In addition, paragraph 8 is emphatic: “The alarming rate of growth of the burden of both death and disability from non-communicable diseases in Africa is ever more recognized, with chronic diseases becoming more prevalent, linked to demographic, behavioral and social changes and urbanization....” On the other hand, paragraph 7 reminded of neglected tropical diseases that severely debilitate communities affected by them. These include: “Onchocerciasis, Trypanosomiasis, Schistosomiasis, Dracunculiasis (Guinea Worm) and Filariasis”

ii. Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

The rise of non-communicable diseases and their impact in low- and middle-income countries is currently raising concern.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) kill more than 36 million people each year with nearly 80% of NCD deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries. Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths (17 million people) annually, followed by cancers (7.6 million), respiratory diseases (4.2 million), and diabetes (1.3 million). These four diseases share four risk factors: tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets.

NCDs threaten progress towards the UN Millennium Development Goals. The rapid rise in NCDs is predicted to impede poverty reduction initiatives in low-income countries, particularly by forcing up household costs associated with health care. Increased government expenditure on health, given the chronic nature of NCDs is likely to divert financial resources from other developmental programmes. The exorbitant costs of NCDs, including often lengthy and expensive treatment, where coupled with the loss of breadwinners, is likely to force millions of people into poverty in Africa, stifling development.

The challenge of Non-communicable diseases in Africa should therefore be addressed urgently to ensure that gains recorded in the health (and socio-economic) status of Africans is not reversed.

iii. Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)

Globally, an estimated one billion of people are at risk of being infected by NTDs, and approximately 534,000 deaths occur annually as a result of NTDs. Up to 90% of the burden of NTDs is believed to occur in Africa.

Although medically diverse, NTDs share features that allow them to persist in conditions of poverty, in addition to thriving in the heat and humidity of tropical climates. Of the 14 diseases listed as NTDs occurring in Africa, most are parasitic, spread by insects whilst others multiply through contaminated water and soil infested with the eggs of worms. Poor sanitation and limited access to basic health care play a role in the heavy burden of these diseases in poor communities.

The main challenges in tackling NTDs in Africa include inadequate awareness on the scale of the impact of NTDs against the background of control programmes aimed at the big three (HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Tuberculosis).

NTDs affect the poor disproportionately and are especially prevalent among children and adolescents. They impair physical and cognitive development, cause adverse pregnancy outcomes, and limit adult productivity in the workforce. As a result, NTDs cause billions of dollars in lost wages and economic productivity, all but ensuring that those at risk of infection remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and disease.

Africa needs to review its current approach to tackling NTDs as they are an economic burden and pose a threat not only to the attainment of MDGs but to the overall development on the long term.

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The sixth Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Health will provide an opportunity for Ministers of Health to share experiences and learn from each other on ongoing programmes and activities on health. It will also provide opportunity to review progress made towards the attainment of the Health MDGs.

Furthermore, the 6th Session will provide an important forum for Member States, social partners, RECs, development partners and other stakeholders, to thoroughly discuss the theme of the conference: “***The Impact of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) on Development in Africa***”, and in particular to:

- i. To increase awareness on the challenges of NTDs and NCDs in Africa;
- ii. To facilitate decision on strong actions against NTDs and NCDs in Africa;
- iii. Consider progress on the implementation of the recommendations of CAMH5;
- iv. To articulate the essential elements on a continental strategy to increase resource mobilizing, especially domestic resources and enhance efficiency of health programmes in Africa;

C. AGENDA ITEMS

In the Sixth African Union Conference of Ministers of Health, the agenda items will include addressing the challenge of NCDs and NTDs in Africa, review progress in implementation of decisions of CAMH5, and consideration of the status of implementation of AU health initiatives.

The conference will therefore consider the following issues: the Report of implementation of CAMH5 Decisions, update on the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa (PMPA); update on the implementation of the Maputo Plan of Action (MPoA) including the 2013 Annual Status Report on MNCH in Africa, update on the implantation of the Abuja Call for Accelerated Action towards Universal Access to HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Services and discussion of challenges of (International and domestic) resource mobilization for health in Africa.

D. FORMAT OF THE CONFERENCE

The Conference will be organized as follows:

- a) Experts’ Meeting: from 22 to 23 April 2013;
- b) Experts meeting on AIDS Watch Africa; 24 April 2013;
- c) Ministers’ Meeting: from 25 to 26 April 2013.

There would also be side events relating to the theme; Non-Communicable Diseases and Neglected Tropical Diseases.

E. OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE

The 6th Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Health is expected to be highly interactive and constructive, in view of the items to be discussed. Recommendations adopted, shall reposition the African continent in addressing challenges in the health

sector. Through sharing of experiences, the lessons learnt will, subsequently, be applied to adjust the current health interventions.

F. DOCUMENTS

In addition to the relevant AU Policy Documents that are available on the AU Website (<http://www.au.int/>), other documentation shall be availed during the meeting in accordance with the agenda items.

G. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

The African union Commission will be responsible for sending out invitations as well as preparation of the agenda, programme and working documents. There will be translation and interpretation in all four (4) AU working languages (Arabic, English, French and Portuguese).

H. PARTICIPANTS

Participants will include: Ministers of Health and Experts, AU Organs, representatives of non-AU Member States accredited to the AU, representatives of RECs, UN and other international agencies, Regional Health Organizations, CSOs/NGOs, health professional organizations and other social partners.

I. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Additional information could be obtained from the following:

Dr Olawale Maiyegun
Director, Dept of Social Affairs
African Union Commission
P O Box 3243
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251 115 51 77 00/ Ext 300
Email: maiyequno@africa-union.org
Copy to OlajideA@africa-union.org and HarakeyeM@africa-union.org