



GOVERNMENT OF KIRIBATI

GoK(12)DPF 08

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS FORUM

Tarawa, Kiribati
25 – 27 June 2012

AGENDA ITEM 08 : Health

Purpose:

1. To highlight some of the on-going health challenges facing Kiribati despite all the efforts and measures to counteract and reduce their prevalence. These health challenges will continue to put pressure on the country's limited financial resources and increase dependency on external assistances.

Background:

2. As a member of the international community, Kiribati is obligated to meet its international and regional commitments on health which includes, among others, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) by 2015. Despite progress being made on some key indicators, Kiribati is not yet on course to achieve its health-related MDG targets due to a number of factors that include resource constraints.
3. With a fast growing population and its detrimental impact on the country's health status, the Ministry of Health has identified family planning to be one of the top priority areas to address in the next National Health Strategic Plan, 2012 – 2015 which is due to complete soon.
4. Family planning is a cross-cutting issue which requires long term commitment and active participation from all stakeholders including the churches and members of the community. The recorded national population annual growth rate of 2.8% provides clear signals that Kiribati will continue to face great challenges in the delivery of health services for more years to come. As part of the on-going efforts to effectively deliver family planning activities and services to the community, the Ministry of Health has already established strong partnership with a non-government organisation known as the Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA) as its key implementation partner on family planning and all other related activities.

5. Child mortality and morbidity is still high in Kiribati. Whilst some progress were being made in reducing the infant and under-five mortality rate since 1990, recent health data have shown that progress have not moved as expected. The number of admissions, children in particular, to the main hospital in Nowerewere has seen a dramatic increase in recent years. The Children's ward at the main hospital in Nowerewere have now often experienced overcrowding than ever before and at times, sick children are left lying on the floor. Neonatal conditions and spread of infectious diseases, diarrhoea and malnutrition amongst children, particularly in overcrowded places on South Tarawa and Betio, are the principal causes of admissions and death.
6. Despite some improvements being made on maternal health, Kiribati still faced with a lot of challenges. The Obstetric ward occupancy average rate has reached 100% almost on a daily basis. The number of deliveries at the main hospital in Nowerewere alone is about 100 babies born every month. This trend will add more pressure on the delivery of quality health services to the mothers and more so, on the national government for the need to improve and expand the hospital's maternal facilities and care. In 2010, there was one reported maternal death and in 2011, there were two reported cases.
7. The transmission and spread of infectious diseases are on the rise. The overcrowding problem currently experienced, particularly on South Tarawa and Betio, has already provided perfect conditions for the transmission and spread of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis. Recent data from the hospital have indicated that South Tarawa and Betio recorded high incidence of infectious diseases compared to the rest of the outer islands in Kiribati. Overcrowding, inadequate water supplies, unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, poor health seeking behaviours and poor hygiene are the common contributing factors to the spread of infectious diseases and the children are the most affected ones.
8. New reported cases of tuberculosis (TB) are increasing. Despite the 93% success treatment rate and the 83% detection rate, TB remains high among the population and is one of the highest in the Western Pacific region. The incidence of sexually transmissible infections such as STI is also on the rise. HIV/AIDS was first confirmed in Kiribati in 1991 and the number of people infected continues to rise. With the latest data, Kiribati had a cumulative total of 54 HIV/AIDS confirmed cases, 26 out of which have been confirmed dead.
9. Sustaining progress on TB treatment success rates and HIV prevalence will be a challenge as the HIV and TB programmes are very dependent on funding from development partners and global health initiatives.

10. Changes in our people's life style and high dependency on processed imported foods, smoking and lack of physical exercises escalate the increase in non-communicable diseases (NCD). The hospital data indicates that 55% of the primary causes of death in the hospital are associated with NCDs. The leading NCD problems are diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and cancers.
11. NCD STEPS report shows that 61.3% of the population are smokers, 50.1% were not physically active, 81.5% are overweight, 28.1% were detected to have diabetes, 17.3% had hypertension and 27.7% were found to have high cholesterol level in their blood. The survey demonstrates that there is an alarming level of risk factors among the population. The high endemic of NCD has obviously added another major challenge alongside the high prevalence of infectious diseases.

Issues:

12. The population is growing fast and the acceptance of family planning contraceptive methods has received less supports from most of the population based on religious beliefs thus pose a challenge in advocating family planning.
13. Overcrowding and poor water and sanitation particularly on the two main urban centres, South Tarawa and Betio have provided great health challenges to tackle as data reviewed that the incidence of infectious diseases is high in these two areas.
14. The prevalence and incidence of non-communicable diseases amongst the population is on the rise. The majority of admissions to the hospital are diabetic, hypertension and cardiovascular patients.
15. The deteriorating condition and capacity of the health infrastructures are no longer able to support the growing number of admissions to the hospital particularly the Obstetric and Children's wards.

Recommendations:

16. Efforts should now be focused on addressing family planning with the involvement of all stakeholders and the support from development partners.

17. More efforts and resources should be provided to support primary and preventative health care programmes to counteract the fast increasing incidence and prevalence of communicable and non-communicable diseases.
18. In supports of Kiribati efforts achieving its health related MGDs, improvement and expansion of the maternity and children's wards require urgent attention.
19. Water and sanitation requires strong cooperation between different stakeholders and it has been evidently associated with child mortality globally and the spread of deadly organisms that are endemic in Kiribati such as Typhoid and Rota virus and could facilitate easy spread of cholera.