

Summary Record

Policy Coherence for Health and Development

26 October, 9-11 am, OECD Auditorium

Executive summary

Mr. Stephen Lewis, Co-director of AIDS-free World, called upon the OECD to be tough and uncompromising when it comes to policy coherence for development. He asked that increased attention be paid to *(i)* the implications on human health of climate change; *(ii)* the transfer of technology; and *(iii)* gender equality. He saw as the single most important achievement in the struggle for gender equality the recent adoption by the United Nations General Assembly to create a new UN agency for women. OECD Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Aart de Geus, agreed with Mr. Lewis on the importance of gender equality and its impact on improving health conditions. He stated that there is new attention for gender equality at the OECD, renaming it as a key responsibility of the Organisation to provide steering and guidance for member states.

OECD Deputy Secretary-General Aart de Geus welcomed Ambassadors, delegates and staff to this seminar on *Improving Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) in the Health Sector*. He stated that access to affordable and quality health care services is essential for rich and poor people alike. Good health improves people's wellbeing. Healthy workers are more productive and healthy students learn better. In many OECD countries, health care is one of the most important and dynamic growth sectors in the economy. In fact, the health sector has been growing in terms of employment also during the recent economic downturn. This is primarily due to successful technological innovations, but also the fact that the population is ageing, thus creating more demand for health care services.

But people across the world do not have equal means to prevent and treat diseases. In a time of global recession we need to ensure that health outcomes between developed and developing countries do not widen. We have to make sure that our policies work together and are supportive of development. Policy coherence for development is essential for combating the spread of diseases, maintaining a healthy workforce and ultimately reducing poverty.

Questions arising from current global demographic trends, the financing of medical innovation, the understanding of the potentials of medical research, and emerging medical issues should be dealt with forcefully and timely. The OECD has in fact identified health as one of its priorities. We have produced a large database on health status and quality indicators, developed guidelines for health accounting, and analysed the organisation and performance of health systems, including

pharmaceutical pricing policies, long-term care, health workforce issues, prevention of diseases, and health information and communication technologies. Coupled with its expertise in other policy areas, the OECD is ideally placed to study the economics of health and to help governments promote coherence in their health and development policies.

Mr. Stephen Lewis, Professor in Global Health, Faculty of Social Sciences at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada and Co-director of AIDS-free World, gave a very stimulating speech highlighting the importance of addressing the coherence of policies to improve health outcomes worldwide. In particular, he asked that increased attention be paid to *(i)* the implications on human health of climate change; *(ii)* the transfer of technology; and *(iii)* gender equality.

Mr. Lewis told the audience about what he saw as the single most important achievement in the struggle for gender equality, namely the recent adoption by the United Nations General Assembly to create a new UN agency for women. This agency, which is to be an independent agency with adequate stature, resources, operational capacity in the field, and high level leadership to drive the agenda of gender equality, will be created in early 2010, during the fifteenth anniversary year of the historic UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The formation of this agency is intended to create system wide coherence across the UN system for women and girls and gender equality, including matters related to HIV/AIDS, political participation, and economic empowerment. It will enable the UN and its member states to deliver on their promises to advance gender equality and women's rights, which are essential components of development at the global and country levels.

Mr. Lewis also pointed out the big gap between OECD and African countries in terms of health and drugs provision. OECD countries spend USD 239 on *drugs only* (per person/year) whereas in Africa USD 6 are spent on health care *in total*. However, the solution does not lie in outsourcing health care to the private sector. User fees do not work in developing countries, rather they compromise human health. Similarly, Public Private Partnerships are not always a good alternative, as funding is limited.

Related to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, he underscored the provision of generic drugs. As a positive example he mentioned the initiative of a Patent Pool which was strongly promoted by France and Germany in Pittsburgh at the G-20 Summit Meeting in September 2009. This project is a very efficient way to break down the monopoly of the pharmaceutical industry. As a negative example he spoke about the Canadian Cabinet taking five years to produce anti-retroviral generic drugs for shipment to Rwanda; Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) being the intervening broker.

Finally, he pointed to the responsibility of OECD member countries to progress on PCD, as well as on the OECD to be tough and uncompromising when it comes to PCD and gender equality. Besides, the role and recognition of multilateralism in promoting policy coherence for health and development should be assessed more thoroughly and dealt with in OECD publications.

Mr. de Geus fully agreed with Mr. Lewis on the importance of gender equality and its impact on improving health conditions. He stated that there is new attention for gender equality at the OECD, renaming it as a key responsibility of the Organisation to provide steering and guidance for member states.

Mr. Andrew Wyckoff, Director, Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry, OECD, introduced the most recent publication in the Development Dimension series, *Coherence for Health: Innovation for New Medicines for Infectious Diseases*. This report, which brings together outcomes and background papers of the 2007 High-Level Forum (HLF) on Policy Coherence: Availability of Medicines for Neglected and Emerging Infectious Diseases, looks at how innovation and technology can contribute to positive outcomes with regard to health provision. Innovation matters for social welfare and the transfer of technology, knowledge and technical skills to developing countries is indispensable. In this context, the HLF agreed on the Noordwijk Medicines Agenda (NMA) which aims to further coherent policies on innovation to improve the availability of medicines and calls for several improvements in the health-innovation system.

Mr. Wyckoff also highlighted the importance of more effective co-operation between government structures, recognising that this requires new models and strategies as well as improved knowledge management.

Ambassador Laurence Argimon-Pistre, European Commission, emphasised that the EC is committed to boost progress in order to reach the health MDGs in 2015, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, which currently lags far behind. Progress has been reached through the 10th EDF Mid-Term Review in close cooperation with partner countries, Vulnerability FLEX mechanisms, MDG contracts and predictable resources that should translate into additional public funding for health, as recommended by the OECD. In addition, Ambassador Argimon-Pistre mentioned the problem of brain drain and the WHO-led engagement of elaborating a code of conduct for international recruitment of health personnel, in which the EU wants to play a significant role.

Ambassador Augustín García-López, Mexico, began to note his country's progress since the 1950s with regard to epidemiological diseases. He also commented on Mexico's low per-capita spending on pharmaceuticals (more than 50% has to be covered by out-of-pocket spending), and the challenge of balancing health concerns with economic interests. Ambassador García-López also discussed Mexico's role in moving PCD concerns forward, for instance in the field of international migration of health professionals. Thus far, he said, Mexico does not face the problem of brain drain, rather it is the more positive trend of brain circulation that dominates migration patterns.