



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Statement

By

**Dr Richard Nchabi Kamwi,
The Honorable Minister of Health and Social Services**

At the

One-Day Meeting of Health Sector Stakeholders

National Health Training Centre

**29 May 2008
Windhoek**

Programme Director, Deputy PS, Dr. Norbert Forster

Hon. Deputy Minister, Cde. Petrina Haingura

UN Country Representative, Mr. Simon Nhongo

UNFPA Country Representative, Ms. Nuzhat Ehsan

WHO Country Representative, Dr. Magda Robalo

UNICEF Acting Representative, Ms. Madhavi Ashok

USAID Representative, Dr. Peter Gashongi

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Representatives of our international cooperating partners for health

Captains of industry and members of the private sector

Representatives from government agencies, Colleagues

Members of the media

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be with you all at this meeting to discuss how we can continue to improve the impact that our collective efforts is having on the development of the health sector in Namibia. Your support from the inception of Namibian nation-building to the present day will continue to be accorded the greatest level of recognition from the highest level of the leadership of our country. Today's event is another significant milestone in the development of our health sector in Namibia, a sector that you all have been associated with all these years.

As I prepared for this meeting, I thought of the many areas in which Namibia has benefited from the variety of support received from all the stakeholders in the health sector. From the pre-independence period of support for the prevention of communicable diseases and emergency relief including human resource development through the transformation of our health system from one that dealt solely with curative services to the inclusion of primary health care and to the present day wide scale comprehensive health system approach that touches on every facet of our health development. My mind also went through the huge financial and human resources you have continued to place at our disposal. And I came to one inviolable conclusion that, Namibia cannot really thank you enough for this immense support.

Distinguished Participants

Namibia operates a health care system aimed at ensuring equity of access to quality health care services to all its citizens. However, the challenge is how each individual, the family and the community is taking advantage of the available services and facilities to support healthy living. In this regard, the Namibia Vision 2030 reflects its vision for health in the following statement “Namibia is free of the diseases of poverty and inequality; and the majority of Namibians are living healthy lifestyles, provided with safe drinking water and comprehensive preventive and curative health services, to which all have equal access”.

In this connection, I can confidently say to this gathering that we have, as leaders in the health sector, made commensurable landmark progress towards attaining this vision and this to a large extent is a result of our collective efforts. With your support, we have been able to make significant achievements in our health care delivery services. Namibia was one of three countries in Africa to reach the 3 by 5 target of making ARV available to half of those who need it. By the end of March 2008, Namibia had placed over 47,000 people living with HIV and AIDS on anti-retroviral therapy. These achievements have been made possible with your support both on technical assistance and funding. Our march towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals has met with some commendable successes in a few areas. We have moved towards meeting some of our targets in MDGs 6, 7 and 8 while our efforts at meeting the MDGs 4 and 5 are not sufficient enough to demonstrate our ability of reaching the targets. In some areas, our lack of adequate data makes it impossible for us to be correctly assessed and placed accordingly.

Programme Director,

As we have progressed positively in a sizeable number of areas of our health development, we have also met with a number of challenges that have at certain times slowed down our efforts. The recent outbreak of polio in the country is one experience in this area.

We have also been faced with emergencies due to natural disasters like the flood in the northern parts of the country. As we grapple with these added difficulties, we are also tasked with the requirements to establish emergency response mechanisms to newly emerging diseases. In addition, we are faced with the need to put in place strategies to minimize drug resistance in key areas of our disease management programmes especially as it relates to Tuberculosis and HIV and AIDS.

In furtherance of improving our response to the health development of our nation, we continue to steer our national health priorities around the control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, improvement of our maternal and newborn health care services and develop sustainable foundation for human resource, including capacity building.

In addition to the above, we are currently conducting the health and social system review. The review is considering issues around governance, human resource, service provision, finance and infrastructure. Some of the key deliverables of the review will be the revision our organizational structure and an update of the health policy framework. Not only that, the review will also help in developing our Primary Health Care strategies, strategies for social development and will culminate in the development of a five-year national strategic plan.

Programme Director,

Allow me to take this opportunity to wholeheartedly express most sincere gratitude, on behalf of the Government of Namibia, through the Ministry of Health and Social Services, to the unwavering and valuable technical assistance that has been given in implementing the health systems review by UNICEF, WHO, USAID, and UNFPA in particular. Thank you.

Distinguished participants,

A large component of our health sector programmes and interventions are supported by you the stakeholders who are here present this afternoon. Because of the huge amount of resources that you provide for us, we also host as many support missions as are needed to make our work go on unhindered. Not only that, we also have to equally respond to your assistance by producing similarly a number of reports to ensure that we continue to enjoy your support.

The demands to respond adequately and efficiently to your support especially in a setting like ours, have no doubt started to tax our capacity as recipients and it is only with your additional support that we have been able to continue to cope in this regard.

This complex stakeholders-recipient interaction has not only been a source of concern to us the recipients. I am aware that it is also giving you all some concern as to how to best support our country without unnecessarily detracting us from the road to development impact that we aimed to achieve at the outset. You are all aware that the global concern around issues as this gave birth to the *“Rome Declaration on Harmonization”* and the *“Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness”*.

You represent different agencies and organizations operating within a variety of programme planning cycles, different funding mechanisms and different reporting systems. In addition, your programme interventions occur at different levels ranging from policy formulations, through guideline development and capacity building to downstream support for service provision, including monitoring and evaluation. In tying all these interventions together and making sure that your assistance is effective and efficient as you will want to see it, the need to establish one broad-based country level coordinating mechanism cannot be over-emphasized. What we can only say is that this is one key activity that is long overdue for action. This is one basic reason why we are here gathered this afternoon.

Programme Director, Distinguished Participants,

You will all agree with me that, our current approach at coordination is built on a number of structures that bring you all together around common areas of interest. For example, we have the Inter-Agency Coordination Committee that bring stakeholders together on immunization. We also have the NACCATUM, the Country Coordinating Mechanism for Global Fund, the quarterly review meetings with the United Nations Agencies and several other standing and ad-hoc committees on different programmes.

Under the prevailing circumstance, it is clear that our working system within the health sector is largely fragmented with an inevitable duplication of your support in many ways or over-subscription to certain programmes or regions. In the present not too well coordinated situation, it will not be too difficult to find certain partners operating outside national priorities, and this may not be their fault anyway. One usually definite outcome of a situation such as this, where we have different partners implementing individual processes and procedures is transaction cost remaining high or continuing to increase over time. I am certain that none of us would want to encourage further polarization of our efforts by advocating for a different approach that through the line Ministry as the custodian of the health sector in Namibia.

While I am convinced that the scenario I have painted here is not what we all desire and wish to see, it is no doubt what we have with us today. It is therefore becoming increasingly challenging for us as a government agency to effectively perform our stewardship role. It is becoming more difficult for us to respond to you efficiently and timely in order to continue to enjoy your ever increasing assistance. As it stands currently, we need a more integrated approach to partner coordination within the health sector more than ever before.

Programme Director,

If we come together to put in place an effective coordination mechanism, we would have set in motion a series of actions that will enable us achieve those national and international targets that all our organizations have committed themselves to. At this point in our march towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, we are clearly frightened by the mere fact that we may not be able to meet some of the set goals. It is now clear that one of the crucial needs for the attainment of these goals is an efficient and sustainable partner assistance coordination mechanism.

We need a system that goes beyond spending on health as this will only mean a short-lived victory for the development of our country and also for the success that our partners report back to their funders. What we need is a system that invests in health with a success that will be long-lasting for both our organizations and countries.

My charge to you at this meeting therefore is for us to consider how we will work in a more coordinated fashion than we have done so far. This meeting is an initial step in this direction with the hope that by the time we depart from here this afternoon we would have commenced a process that will bring us to the door post of the harmonization and partner coordination in Namibia. Once we have agreed on the most appropriate structure through which to coordinate our efforts, we should formalize it into an annual event.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A time like this requires us to begin to think as one body with a common goal. Even where we have different strategies in reaching our set goals, there is one thing that we should focus our minds on, and that is the country that all your assistance efforts are meant for. It is the support for the country that binds us together. We need your guidance on how to progress on this. We will also require your support as we move down the road to implement whatever plans we agree on at this meeting.

We want to have a coordination plan that is based on a common agreement among us. A plan that you all as stakeholders in the health sector of this country will be encouraged to support and help to sustain.

This is the direction that I think we should move towards at this point in time. As we jointly put this in place, we will be encouraged to exercise an effective leadership over our development policies, strategies and the coordination of the assistance provided by our partners to the mutual benefit of our country and your organizations. In this way, our partners will also be encouraged to work in a way that their supports are harmonized and collectively effective to the good of our country.

We will, as a nation, be able to manage both our internal and external resources efficiently and also improve on our decision making for results.

We are aware of your concerns regarding the sustainability of the programmes post your assistance. I am pleased to report that Government has in this current financial year increased its allocation to the health sector, moving closer to the desired commitment set out in the Abuja Declaration. Public health allocation increased from 13.8% in 2007/08 to 14.2% in 2008/09. In absolute terms, this is a 27% increase in the health budget. Furthermore, this translates into an increase in the health budget from 4.3 to 5.0% of GDP from the previous financial year.

Programme Director,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for listening.