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WHO Ethiopia Hosts Technical Network Meeting on HIV/AIDS and STI Surveillance

The WHO Country Office in Ethiopia hosted WHO/Africa Technical Network on HIV/AIDS and STI Surveillance here in Addis Ababa at the Ghion Hotel from 1st – 3rd July 2009. This Technical Network has been operational since 1998 in a bid to serve as a platform providing and feedback and technical advice to the Regional Office and countries. Accordingly, the network meets on biennial basis and to date five meetings have been conducted, which represented a forum for HIV Second Generation Surveillance (SGS) has been promoted and discussed and possible updates proposed by WHO.



the last meeting of the network that took place in 2006.

“By the end of 2007, an estimated 33 million people were living with the HIV virus world-wide. 2 out of 3 of these people live in countries south of the Sahara. In addition, two-thirds of the estimated 2.5 million new infections occur in this same Region. The heaviest burden, however, comes in the form of AIDS-related deaths. Out of the estimated global total of 1.6 million AIDS deaths more than three-quarters have occurred in this Region alone,” Dr. Fatoumata told the participants.

On the occasion, the Guest of Honor, Dr. Tsehaynesh Mesele, Director General of the Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute (EHNRI), thanked WHO for organizing this meeting and welcome all the participants on behalf of the Ethiopian Federal ministry of Health and EHNRI. In her opening address she noted that such meetings help countries to exchange their experiences, best practices and new development in HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) surveillance.

Ethiopia’s HIV/AIDS burden still poses a formidable challenge to national authorities and society at large. Despite the impressive efforts in mounting a robust, comprehensive and increasingly effective national response, the figures are daunting. In 2008, over 1 million people were living with the virus in Ethiopia, with 2.2% estimated HIV prevalence. Sadly, women and children constitute the groups most affected by the epidemic, including over 880,000 children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS.

Dr. Fatoumata Nafo-Traoré, WHO Country Representative, on her part expressed her pleasure to hosting the meeting in Addis Ababa. She reminded the participants to take stock of where the epidemic and efforts have progressed since

Dr. Tsehaynesh stressed the role of HIV surveillance plays in response to the epidemic. She said “Ethiopia has been conducting ANC sentinel sur-





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veillance since 1989 as a mainstay of monitoring the progress of the disease, the recent round being in 108 sites.”

Thus the question must be what role this formidable network of expertise can play to address such challenges? As in other countries, the foundation of such estimates for Ethiopia is of course the HIV surveillance system or the 2ND generation HIV surveillance system—as it is often called. All countries in the WHO African Region adopted this surveillance system, and generate valuable information from Antenatal Care (ANC) clinics and through population-based surveys and they rely on this system to provide valuable information on HIV trends, STIs, and sexual behavior. Although the quality of the HIV surveillance system is improving in the African region, there are a growing number of countries where implementation is faltering or sub-standard.

“It is my understanding that one of the objectives of this meeting is to explore ways of using routine PMTCT data for HIV surveillance. So I hope your



recommendations will lead us towards this objective—since Ethiopian authorities and their partners, including WHO, are struggling to find ways of increasing PMTCT access and basic strategic information to guide this effort is desperately needed” Dr Fatoumata underscored.

This meeting brought together HIV Surveillance Experts and Program Mangers at all level throughout Africa.

