



Pacific Island countries off-track in meeting MDGs

By Online Editor

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WHO South Pacific Office Technical Officer Nutrition and Physical Activity, Dr Temo Waqanivalu

The Pacific Island countries face four main challenges and bottlenecks for reaching Millennium Development Goals four and five targets.

World Health Organisation (WHO) South Pacific Office Technical Officer Nutrition and Physical Activity Dr Temo Waqanivalu said many countries had developed national policies for maternal and child health with central level political commitment.

MDG four refers to child mortality while MDG five focuses on maternal health.

“However, such commitment often not translated to provincial and district level,” Dr Temo said.

“As a consequence, we know that a weak health system in particular the implementation level is

one of important bottlenecks.

“For example, management capacity at district and village level is often weak and referral system from remote island to better equipped facility sometimes not in place,” he said.

Dr Waqanivalu said there was inadequate evidence-based policy development because of a lack of data.

He said there was also inadequate funding or inefficient use of available resources.

Dr Waqanivalu said globally many countries had faced challenges to reach MDG targets, in particular child and women's health and the Pacific was no exception.

He said while child mortality of under-five-year olds decreased in most countries, some would not meet their targets.

“For MDG five, progress is taking place but slow overall,” he said.

He said maternal deaths in big island countries such as Papua New Guinea seemed to not have declined.

“The other observation is that the Pacific region has only achieved a fraction of the MDG four and five targets of reducing under five mortality by two-thirds and reducing MMR (maternal mortality rate) by three-quarter, from 1990 to 2015.

“Another observation in this assessment is that when comparing progress made in MDG four and five, statistics show that MDG four is ahead of MDG five.” Dr Waqanivalu said the Pacific was “off-track” for the achievement of MDG four and five and would need concerted efforts to get on track towards 2015.

Meanwhile, the Pacific is indeed in crisis because of non-communicable diseases (NCD).

Last week, delegates from the 22 Pacific Island countries met in Tonga to discuss the growing crisis.

In 2007, PICs with the help of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), and funding from Australia and New Zealand drew up a four-year program called the Pacific Framework for the Prevention and Control of NCDs.

Called 2-1-22, the joint effort not only focuses on the crisis but ways PICs can scale up and address the NCD epidemic.

In September, the United Nations high level meeting in New York will discuss NCD Prevention and Control.

According to outcomes of the ninth meeting of health ministers in Honiara, Solomon Islands in July this year, such communiqués from Nadi, Honiara and Tonga NCD forums “will allow leaders in the Pacific to carry the voice of their people to the meeting so that global initiatives

reflect needs and concerns of the Pacific”.

SOURCE: FIJI TIMES/PACNEWS