



PNG needs data for sustainable development

GOROKA, June 1, 2016 – In Papua New Guinea, the need for a better quality and quantity of data is crucial for sustainable development. In recent years, there has been increased global demand by governments for evidence-based policy for sustainable development.

With the launching of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations in September 2015, this has set a new momentum for the global development towards 2030. While reporting data for development is complex, it requires great efforts for countries to collect data for reporting the country's progress at the national and sub-national levels. The need for a better quality and greater quantity of data are therefore crucial for the SDGs.

One of the most challenges to the PNG Government in assessing the achievement of the socio-economic development programmes has been the absence of reliable data and appropriate measures. Like many other developing countries, PNG faces the major challenge in collecting and reporting data to inform decision-making processes. At present, the country has insufficient data for monitoring and evaluation of public health programmes, including measuring long-term impacts of public health interventions and reporting upon key population health indicators.

A fully functioning civil registration system, which is often considered as potential data source for reporting population health indicators, does not currently exist in PNG. Demographic and Health Surveys are conducted in PNG at ten-year intervals, with the most recent one conducted in 2006, leaving a large data gap in effective reporting of population health status over the past decade. Life styles and living conditions of the PNG population have been changing rapidly as a result of the recent socio-economic development, potentially leading to shifts in the burden of diseases. Research into the social determinants and health effects of urbanization will provide important implications for the Government and particularly the health sector in development and implementation of evidence-based policies.

*"To meet with those demands, integrated and sustainable approaches are urgently needed," says **Dr Bang Nguyen Pham, Head of Population Health and Demography Unit, PNGIMR.** "International experience and lessons learned from the global surveillance systems indicates that it has great contributions to collecting and reporting data for development."*

The integrated Health and Demographic Surveillance System (iHDSS) of PNG has been operated by the PNG Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) since 2011, with financial support from the ExxonMobil PNG and technical assistance from the University of Queensland and James Cook University of Australia. The system is capable of reporting 33 former Millennium Development Goals' indicators which form the core of Sustainable Development Goals reporting. That needs to be considered for their potential as an independent and complementary data source for sustainable development of PNG.

*"The iHDSS offers integrated socio-economic and demographic data at the household and individual levels, linked between clinical, laboratory, morbidity and mortality data with epidemiological, environmental, healthcare system data, using a unique individual identification coding system", said **Dr Pham.** "This also facilitates linkages in its database with other national data sources available such as national censuses and health management information systems."*

"This will improve the availability, accessibility and utilisation of existing national data, an initial step to establish a foundation of a national population health database for the entire PNG population in the future."

*"The iHDSS is a valuable asset to PNG as it can strengthen the system to better assist the PNG Government in defining health priorities, more equitable allocation and effective utilisation of the national resources, in order to meet the country's demand for data for sustainable development," said **Professor Peter Siba, Director of PNGIMR.***

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