

CONCEPT NOTE

Special Initiative for Action on the Social Determinants of Health for Advancing Health Equity (the SDH Initiative): country pathfinders meeting

DATE: 19-21 March 2024

VENUE: Geneva

MEETING AIM

The purpose of the meeting is to share country experiences on implementing actions to address the social determinants of health (SDH) for advancing health equity, to reflect on lessons learnt during Phase I of the SDH Initiative (2020-2024), and to finalise the joint proposal and plan of work for Phase II (2025-2028).

The World Health Organization (WHO) and three core partners began collaborating on the SDH Initiative in 2019. The collaboration involves WHO (three levels); the University College London/Institute of Health Equity (UCL/IHE); the University of Lausanne/UNISANTE (UNIL/UNISANTE); and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The SDH Initiative supports scale-up in action on SDH in WHO, globally and in countries (See reports under: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/action-on-the-social-determinants-of-health-for-advancing-equity>).

The SDH Initiative has made significant progress in advancing health equity by addressing social determinants of health (SDH) through development of the global evidence base, policy narrative, capacity building and through specific demonstration work in countries. The first phase of the SDH Initiative (2020-2024) has established a quorum of countries who have identified priorities for how they plan to take action on the SDH in their respective contexts. Some have already set up operational mechanisms for new models of primary health care that integrate SDH. Others have rolled out deliberative social participation workshops to enhance prioritization of government resources for people' needs. The country pathfinders meeting will provide the first opportunity for participating countries to meet face-to-face to share their experiences.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Addressing the social determinants of health is essential to dealing with health inequities. The SDH Initiative calls upon governments, international organizations, and political leaders to



collaborate with affected communities and individuals in addressing the SDH and health inequities and implementing effective solutions.

The SDH Initiative began with a first phase that runs from 2020-2024. During the first phase of the SDH Initiative, 2020-2024, the core partners have worked at 3-levels – globally, regionally and country-level – to develop a new narrative and evidence on the social determinants, improve capacity building and mainstreaming, increase advocacy activities on health equity and to develop models for practical uptake of addressing social determinants of health on the ground with national and local governments and communities.

During the first years of Phase I (2020-2021), the SDH Initiative started with a focus on raising awareness, publishing a global COVID-19 equity report, and engaging with countries. In the latter years of Phase I (2022-23), the emphasis shifted towards the WHO World Report, supporting regional and country-level knowledge, networking, model building, and developing consolidated country action plans. By 2024, as Phase I concludes, the SDH Initiative aims to have incorporated assessments of SDH health equity into health, social, and economic policies (including considering COVID-19 recovery policy and plans), in at least 6 countries.

To achieve this objective, the Initiative has outlined four workstreams: Advancing the SDH equity global knowledge base, Capacity building through SDH equity trainings and mainstreaming, Regional strengthening and country action on SDH equity, and Advocacy for SDH equity.

Phase II of the SDH Initiative runs from 2025-2028. Planning for the second phase along with a funding proposal to be submitted to SDC has to be concluded by the end of March 2024.

The overall vision of the SDH Initiative is for societies to prevent health inequities by improving the SDH for groups facing the most adverse living and working conditions. The goal of the Initiative is to demonstrate tangible reductions in health inequities by improving the social circumstances that promote health and access to quality healthcare for at least 20 million disadvantaged people (both direct and indirect beneficiaries) in a minimum of 12 countries by 2028.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COUNTRY PATHFINDERS MEETING

The main objectives of the meeting are:

1. Knowledge Exchange: Provide a platform for participants from different countries and levels (national and local municipalities) to share their experiences, initiatives, and lessons learned during Phase I of the Initiative.

2. Facilitate Reflection on Practice and Theory of Change: Create opportunities for participants to reflect on the achievements and progress made during Phase I of the Initiative. Emphasis will be placed on identifying and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, allowing participants to gain insights and inspiration from each other's experiences.
3. Policy Alignment: Promote dialogue and coordination among stakeholders to ensure that Phase II of the Initiative is in line with national and international priorities for advancing action on social determinants of health and health equity and with the recommendations of the forthcoming WHO World Report on the Social Determinants of Health Equity.
4. Collaborative Problem-Solving: Review the Phase II proposal and engage in constructive discussions to identify opportunities, key challenges, risks, and mitigation strategies.
5. Partnership Strengthening: Engage additional partners, including considering regional banks, to foster collaboration and synergy. By expanding the network of partners, the Initiative can leverage diverse expertise and resources to enhance the sustainability of efforts in addressing social determinants of health.
6. Enhance visibility: Use the meeting discussions to advance the action narrative and follow-up to engage with global stakeholders, national finance and development ministries, and donors to increase awareness and involvement of global stakeholders and donors in supporting the SDH Initiative's goals.

KEY THEMES

Day 1 and Day 2: Country exchange and learning

Review the Evaluation of First Phase: Assessing the impact, outcomes, outputs' effectiveness, and lessons learned from the implementation of the initial phase of the Initiative, including awareness campaigns, the COVID-19 equity report, and country engagement activities. This theme will focus on evaluating outcomes, identifying areas for improvement, and applying insights to enhance the effectiveness of the Initiative in the second phase.

Further discuss Success Factors and Challenges: Analyzing the factors that contributed to successful interventions and identifying the challenges that hindered progress during the first phase. This theme will facilitate discussions on replicating successful strategies, addressing barriers, and developing informed strategies for the next phase.

Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building: Promoting the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned among participating countries. This theme underscores the importance of capacity building initiatives, training programs, and knowledge transfer mechanisms to

strengthen countries' capacity in addressing social determinants of health and advancing health equity.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework: exploring the further development of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks for action in the second phase. This theme highlights the importance of measuring progress, collecting baseline data, and assessing the impact of interventions on health equity and social determinants of health. It also highlights the link between monitoring at the local level and at the national level, and the use of the WHO Operational Framework for Monitoring the Social Determinants of Health Equity.

Day 3: Refine overall proposal and sharpen individual country planning

Refining of Second Phase proposal: Exploring innovative approaches and strategies for the next phase of the Initiative. This theme will involve collaborative discussions on policy interventions, capacity building initiatives, and partnerships to effectively address social determinants of health and promote health equity.

Resource Mobilization: Examining mechanisms and strategies for mobilizing financial and technical resources to support the implementation of the second phase.

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration: Emphasizing the significance of engaging and collaborating with diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and communities. This theme will explore strategies to foster meaningful partnerships, enhance community participation, and ensure inclusive decision-making processes.

PARTICIPANTS

1. Government representatives from participating countries at the national and local municipality levels.
2. Experts and researchers in the field of social determinants of health and health equity.
3. Community and civil societies representatives.
4. Donors and funding agencies supporting initiatives related to SDH and health equity.
5. UN agencies in collaboration with WHO at global and country levels.
6. Consider implementers in other countries, regional development agencies and banks.
7. WHO staff from HQ, Regional and Country Offices.