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Timor-Leste's drive towards Universal Health Coverage highlighted at WHO Regional Conference in Bhutan

The World Health Organization is bringing together international public health experts, development agencies and academia to share experiences and identify ways forward for universal health coverage (UHC) at a Conference on Advancing Universal Health Coverage in South-East Asia in Paro, Bhutan between April 23-25th, 2014.

The WHO Conference will share international experience on equitable financing for health systems so that people can get the care they need without being pushed into poverty. In South-East Asia, out-of-pocket payments for health are the highest among all the WHO regions and one-third of new annual poverty is health related. Discussions will also focus on access to affordable medicines and human resources, issues that severely impact on effective service delivery. The Conference is expected to agree on the way forward for WHO's work to advance universal health coverage in the Region.

Earlier this year, Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, the Regional Director WHO South-East Asia, prioritized universal health coverage and robust health systems in her vision statement as one of four strategic areas for WHO's work in the Region. During the conference, Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh highlighted the vital role of UHC in strengthening health sector results and the urgent need for all countries throughout the Region to strengthen efforts to counter the increasing burden of noncommunicable diseases, especially through preventive activities that are low-cost and sustainable.

The experience of Timor-Leste was highlighted by Dr. Rajesh Pandav, Health Policy Advisor, WHO Country Office to Timor-Leste and Sr Mateus Cunha, Head of the Planning, Policy and Cooperation Department, Ministry of Health, with the handover of the 2013 annual report on the "EU-WHO Universal Health Coverage Partnership in Timor-Leste; supporting policy dialogue on national health policies, strategies and plans and universal health coverage," to the Regional Director, Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh.

In 2013, the European Union (EU) and the World Health Organization began a 3 year partnership project in Timor-Leste to improve health sector results by developing and implementing robust national health policies, increasing coverage of essential health services, developing financial risks protection, health equity, and harmonizing international cooperation for health. A detailed report of the activities completed in 2013 is available at the following link:

http://www.searo.who.int/timorleste/eu_who_uhc_partnership_tl.pdf

Further lessons will be shared and drawn from the conference and applied to the development of Timor-Leste's national health policies and drive towards Advancing Universal Health Coverage.