Corruption, Health and the Sustainable Development Goals

Overview for the Session

- What are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for health and how do they relate to population health and corruption?
  - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and health
  - Progress and challenges of health in the Arab Region
  - Impact of corruption on SDGs and health
- How does corruption manifest in the health sector?
  - Different forms and types of corruption
- Are there tools to mitigate corruption specific to the health sector?
  - Transparency and accountability
  - SCRM tool

Sustainable Development Goals and Health

- SDG 3 explicitly focusses on health "Good health and well-being"
  - WHO definition: "Health is the is state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"
- Majority of other SDG's are related to or contribute to health and well-being
  - Addressing child malnourishment (goal 2.2) improves child health (goal 3.2)
  - Ensuring access to safe water (6.1) or reducing air pollution (11.6) has a positively impact on medical conditions related to environmental health (cholera, typhoid, polio, asthma)
- Key objective of SDG 2030 agenda is to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC)
  - UHC refers to: financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services, access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.
  - Salalah Declaration reinforces regional commitment to UHC
- Direct correlation with SDG 16 "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"

Health in the Arab Region: Progress and Challenges

- Some progress towards developing national health strategies, policies, coverage and laws that strengthen health systems and support UHC, but…
  - A significant effort is still needed to build transparent, accountable, responsive and sustainable health systems that serve the population and improve health outcomes

- Health population indicators across the Arab region show extreme contrasts, but most countries lag in key health indicators*
  - Life expectancies in Somalia and Afghanistan are 56.5 and 63.2 years respectively, Kuwait is 81.0 and Jordan 77.9 years
  - 42 percent of adults in Kuwait are obese and 37 percent of children under 5 years in Sudan are stunted due to lack of sufficient nutrition.

- COVID-19 pandemic a major setback in health progress and corruption flourished
  - Effective counter-measures were introduced but there are underlying structural issues

*Statistics published in World Health Organization Reports for the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Impact of Corruption on SDGs

- Health sector is one of the sectors most vulnerable to corruption
  - Health system complexity, large number of stakeholders involved, large amount of resource flows and transactions at all levels of the health system
  - Estimated $500 billion is siphoned off due to corruption every year – that may be more than the total cost of ensuring global UHC for everyone
  - 45% of global citizens perceive this sector as incompetent, corrupt or very corrupt
- Corruption has a direct negative impact on SDG 3 and slows progress to achieving UHC
  - Impacts the availability of government funding for the health sector, the quality of medicines and the availability of health services and delivery
  - Estimated 140,000 excess children dying annually are a result of corruption
  - 47 percent of surveyed respondents in the Arab region indicated that paying a bribe or "rashwa" is highly necessary or necessary to access better healthcare services
- Undermines trust in public (health) institutions and threatens external donor aid

Forms of Corruption in Health Sector

- Incidence and scale of health care corruption varies in health systems and can take place at many levels. Examples include:

- Smaller, administrative forms of corrupt behavior "petty corruption"
  - Patient pays bribe to a public health administrator of the local clinic for the purposes of immediately accessing a medical specialist and bypass pre-authorizations and/or patient waitlists

- Bureaucratic corruption "greasing the wheels" are bribes paid to government officials to speed up a process or disregard standards
  - Hospital manager bribes government official to issue a hospital license without checking that the hospital meets all the minimum safety requirements

- Grand or political corruption which involves high-level officials (ministers)
  - Health minister awards construction contract to family-owned company and receives kick-backs/commissions

Types of Corruption in Health Sector

Health System Process	Types of corruption	Impact
Education of Health Professionals	- Bribes to gain place in medical school or other pre-service training - Bribes to obtain passing grades - Political influence, nepotism in selection of candidates for training opportunities	- Incompetent professionals practicing medicine or working in health professions - Loss of faith and freedom
Purchase of equipment and supplies, including drugs	- Bribes, kickbacks, and political considerations influence specifications and winners of bids - Collusion or bid rigging during procurement - Unethical drug promotion - Suppliers fail to deliver and are not held accountable	- High cost, inappropriate or duplicative drugs and equipment - Inappropriate equipment located without consideration of true need - Sub-standard equipment and drugs - Inequities due to inadequate funds left to provide for all needs

Table sourced from Vian T, The sectoral dimensions of corruption: health care, Chapter 4 in Spector BI (ed.). Fighting corruption in developing countries. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press Inc, 2005, p45-46.

Types of Corruption in Health Sector

Health System Process	Types of corruption	Impact
Provision of Services by medical personnel and other health workers	- Unnecessary referrals to private practice or privately owned ancillary services - Absenteeism - Informal payments required from patients for services - Theft of user fee revenue, other diversion of budget allocations	- Employees are not available to serve patients, leading to lower volume of services, unmet needs, and higher unit costs for health services delivered - Reduced utilization by patients who cannot pay - Impoverishment as citizens use income and sell assets to pay for health care - Reduced quality of care from loss of revenue - Loss of citizen faith in Government
Regulation of quality in products, services, facilities and professionals	- Bribes to speed process or gain approval for drug registration, drug quality inspection, or certification of good manufacturing practices - Bribes or political considerations influence results of inspections or suppress findings - Biased application of accreditation, certification or licensing procedures and standards	- Sub-therapeutic or fake drugs in market - Marginal suppliers are allowed to continue participating in bids, getting government work - Spread of infectious and communicable diseases - Poor quality facilities continue to function - Incompetent or fake professionals continue to practice

Mitigating Corruption in Health Sector

- Governance and anti-corruption frameworks are linked and share the principles of transparency and accountability
  - Controlling corruption is essential for good governance

- Transparency requires the disclosure of accessible information on roles, responsibilities, use of resources and outcomes or results of a health system

- Accountability is the process in which a public health institution, and the officials within them assume responsibility for their decisions and performance in relation to processes and outcomes within the health system.

- National ACTA mechanisms are needed for improving governance and institutional quality
  - To be fully effective, anti-corruption strategies extend beyond the scope of health ministries and must include a whole-of-society approach

Mitigating Corruption in Health Sector

- Whistleblowing mechanisms are increasingly seen as an effective way to encourage the reporting of misconduct and corruption
  - Reports must avoid reporting channels that lead to corrupt institutions, otherwise individuals will be reluctant to report misconduct

- Participation in global and regional forums are valuable platforms for policymakers and vested stakeholders to collect and disseminate evidence-based approaches towards governance and anti-corruption frameworks
  - ACINET is UNDPs Arab region platform that develops the capacities of members and facilitates information exchange and provides different stakeholders with a joint platform for policy dialogue and action against corruption in various sectors, including health.

- UNDPs Sectoral Corruption Risk Management methodology offers a systematic approach that uniquely assesses, and tackles corruption risks in the health sector