Institutionalizing Community Health: Critical Principles

In March 2017, nearly 400 community health champions from 44 countries, representing multiple sectors, gathered in Johannesburg to share global and country specific evidence and lessons and identify opportunities and challenges – financial and human resources, programmatic, and socio-political – for institutionalizing community health as an integral component of primary health care in order to transform the future and ensure that every mother, newborn, and child not only survives but thrives in the Sustainable Development Goals era.

Champions of community health – including government officials, civil society and private sector leaders, policymakers, sub-national managers and practitioners, researchers, representatives of bilateral and multilateral organization and donors – outlined 10 critical principles that they recommend countries focus on to accelerate progress in health.   To ensure that progress is made towards strengthening community health systems, all community level actors/groups and social networks, formal and traditional systems as well as all sectors with effects on health, will need to join forces to achieve the promise of health for all.

1. Engage with and empower communities to build viable and resilient community health systems with strong links to health and other relevant sectors

2. Empower communities and civil society to hold the health system accountable

3. Build integrated, resilient community health systems based on recognized frontline health workers

4. Implement national community health programs at scale, guided by national policy and local systems context, to ensure impact

5. Ensure sufficient and sustainable financing for community health systems that is based on national and international resources, includes the private sector, and contributes to reducing financial barriers to health

6. Program to reduce health inequities and gender inequalities

7. Ensure that communities facing humanitarian crisis receive essential healthcare, particularly at the community level

8. Invest in the development of inclusive partnerships to leverage and coordinate diverse civil society and private sector actors to support national acceleration plans and enable communities to shape and support the implementation of policies

9. Integrate community data into the health information system, including investment in innovative technologies

10. Employ practical and participatory learning and research to identify, sustain, and scale up effective community interventions while providing opportunities for country-to-country lesson sharing and informing a shared global learning agenda

This is the time for community leaders, policy makers and community health champions to lead this paradigm shift in health systems. Now we must build robust community health systems, supported by empowered and engaged communities, as a foundation of effective and comprehensive health systems that can accelerate progress towards ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all, save lives of millions of children, adolescents, and women and provide opportunity for them thrive and transform the future.