

## Global investment in health still falling short, says WHO

Ministers of health, finance and planning from 40 developing countries joined development partners at WHO for the Second Consultation on Macroeconomics and Health on 29–30 October to develop country-specific plans to increase global health investment.

The meeting marked nearly two years since the launch of the 2001 Report of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health (CMH), which recommended that by 2007, donors should increase investment in health to US\$ 27 billion. Two years on, however, increases in health investment have failed to meet the levels needed to measurably impact major diseases affecting the world's poor, said WHO.

“If we don't increase resources for health and target these resources to activities that will have the greatest impact, we stand to lose millions of men, women and children to disease. This also means trapping individuals and families in poverty and disillusionment,” said WHO's Director-General, Dr LEE Jong-wook.

A recent study at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies found that the total development assistance for health from major selected sources increased from an average of US\$ 6.1 billion between 1997 and 1999 to US\$ 7.7 billion in 2001. Most of this increase in funding was allocated to fighting HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. WHO welcomed the recent increase in health assistance but warned that funding was still falling short of real needs.

The objective of the meeting was to develop concrete plans for increased health investment in countries. According to WHO, continued global leadership and follow-up from the development community, combined with inter-ministerial collaboration are needed: first, to increase resources for health for debt relief, development assistance and domestic resources and second, to eliminate health system and institutional constraints, enabling better absorption of increased resources.

“We need country-specific blueprints for making real increases in health investment. Developing countries and their partners need to collectively and quickly do much more, for health and global stability,” said LEE. ■