

Foreword



Foreword by the Minister

It is my pleasure to introduce the Department's Annual Report for the period 2000/1. The report has a slightly different character this year, with a strong emphasis on financial accountability. This reflects the changing statutory framework of the public service and particularly the impact of the Public Finance Management Act.

The Department of Health has tried to give you a sense of the thinking that underpins the work we are engaged in and not merely a list of activities for the year. The battle against major diseases and the transformation of a complex health system both require sustained effort. We are seldom able to report quick-fix results. But we can share with you the nature of the challenges we face, our strategic goals and our progress towards achieving these, leaving you to judge whether we are on track.

Within this long-term perspective, there are occasionally decisive moments and clear breakthroughs. You will find some of these in our report:

- There are instances where we have reduced the rate of major infectious illnesses through programmes of prevention and good clinical management.
- You will read of new laws that came into effect during the year to protect health and promote access to care.
- You will see evidence of growing relationships with new partners — ranging from traditional healers to multi-national drug companies — that will enable us to serve our people better.

You will also appreciate that any environment constantly produces new health challenges. This is especially true in a country such as ours — where inequality runs deep and poverty is widespread; where urbanization and underdevelopment occur side by side; where life is a roller coast of new dreams and sudden disappointments.

You will note the re-emergence of cholera; the increase in malaria and tuberculosis; and the continued rise in the rate of HIV/AIDS (even though the increase is now less rapid). We also raise concerns about poor nutrition of our children, abuse of women, mental health problems and illness arising from tobacco use and alcohol abuse. All of these health challenges are being actively addressed through strategies appropriate to our circumstances.

Progress often goes hand-in-hand with controversy as it touches on vested interests and draws a reaction. We will not shrink from stirring controversy where we firmly believe that the health of our people is at stake. The laws that we have adopted, defended and begun to implement in relation to tobacco control and accessing affordable medicines are testimony to this. We are proud to list them among our achievements for 2000/1.

In times of transformation, focus may be desirable but it seems to be a luxury we cannot afford. In reality, we are compelled deal simultaneously with the general issues of transformation and specific responses to a wide range of diseases and health problems.



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