Improving Health Care Services in Papua New Guinea

Maternal and infant mortality rates remain high in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Communicable diseases account for around 50% of mortality according to the World Health Organization.

The leading causes of morbidity in the country include pneumonia, malaria, tuberculosis, diarrheal diseases, meningitis and increasingly HIV/AIDS.

To help the Government of PNG improve its rural health services, ADB has approved a loan amounting to $20 million for $81.2 million Rural Primary Health Services Delivery Project.

"People in the countryside have difficulty accessing primary health care services because of poor facilities, and quality services are not available. Inadequate antenatal and postnatal services mean women and children are hardest hit," said Sakiko Tanaka, Social Development Specialist in ADB's Pacific Department.

NGOs' health services

With PNG's diverse culture and languages, it is expected that implementing this project will be extremely challenging. NGOs will be instrumental to the success of the project.

NGOs and civil society play an important role in the delivery of primary health services in PNG for the following reasons:

- they have long years of providing effective health services in the rural areas;
- they reach remote and un-served areas that have no access to government health services;
- they operate approximately half of the rural health centers and sub-centers; and
- they have introduced appropriate approaches like Village Birth Attendants as part of an integrated, effective, and sustainable quality basic family health care delivery system.

"The NGOs will be key implementing partners in two of the total six components of the project," shared Ms. Tanaka.

Working relationships with NGOs

"A vital part of the project is to establish partnerships between the provincial governments and the NGOs and civil society to effectively conduct health promotion activities in local communities. This would definitely strengthen the rural health system in PNG," Ms. Tanaka added.

Carefully designed, the project aims to efficiently deliver high-quality primary health care through the following:

- Enhancing the capacity of the government in developing and implementing community health policies;
- Formalizing partnerships between the government and non-state service providers including churches and NGOs to develop and implement ways to monitor and evaluate the community health outcomes;
- Strengthening the skills and capacity of health personnel through training activities;
- Upgrading community health facilities, providing medical equipment and small vehicles;
- Promoting health in rural communities while also increasing women's involvement in health service delivery; and
- Monitoring project outcomes and results through formative evaluations.

By formally involving NGOs as one of key non-state partners in working and resourcing relationships with the government, NGOs can act as community health service providers and participate in a provincial health partnership mechanism overseeing the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the provincial health activities including project activities.

NGOs will also address community health and violence against women by increasing women's involvement in health service delivery.
Crafting and implementing health awareness and behavioral change activities with community-based organizations are an acknowledged expertise of NGOs. They encourage people to appreciate and actively use the health facilities and services in their communities, including outreach to women and children who seek refuge from domestic violence.

The Rural Primary Health Services Delivery Project was approved by ADB in September 2011. Through the participation of NGOs and civil society, the project will have wider coverage and effectively provide quality primary health care services to communities in the rural areas. The project aims to improve the well-being of 1.2 million women and children in PNG.

Related

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