

*Project “Equal opportunities for health: action for development”
Teaching and advocating global health at the European level*

Health is a fundamental and universal human right incorporated into international legislation. Health is essential for the full development of human potential, not only for the physical, but also for the intellectual and emotional growth of every individual and for the development of the productive and learning capacities required in order to ensure economic well-being and social advancement, both of which, in their turn, are a necessary element to avert potential social imbalances and conflicts.

Guaranteeing health for all means promoting equal opportunities, justice, development and peace. Today, this seems to be one path that could be followed, given the general agreement within the corpus of preventive and curative medical technologies; the scientific knowledge and financial resources now available; and, for the first time in history, the commitment of all nations to the fight against poverty in their pursuit of the eight ambitious Millennium Goals: the health objectives amongst these Goals concern malnutrition, cutting infant mortality rates, improving maternal health and controlling epidemics.

Notwithstanding this, even though at the global level there has been an overall improvement in people’s state of health, the improvement has really only affected one section of the population: indeed, not only are the disparities between nations growing and, especially, those between the North and South of the World, but also the gap is widening between social groups within nations themselves. This latter is particularly clear and important in developing countries, where access to health services is difficult for people who are already economically and socially vulnerable, which causes them to retrogress even further and deepens their poverty.

Such inequalities are socially determined, avoidable, unnecessary and unjust. Therefore they are unacceptable, not only economically and politically, but also at the ethical and moral level. A real and shared commitment is required in order to confront these inequities. Indeed, it is only through collective action that will be possible to raise awareness on these issues, to fight injustice and to promote more equitable policies and a global approach to health.

Based on these premises, Doctors with Africa Cuamm – an Italian non-government organisation committed to promoting the right to health in Africa for over fifty years – has been promoting the Project *Equal opportunities for health: action for development*, co-financed by the European Union, and carried out over a two-year period (May 2007 - July 2009), in partnership with diverse representatives from the health community. The overall aim of the project has been to mobilise public opinion in Europe to create equal opportunities for health.

The wider health community is the direct target of the project. Given the various social and professional roles and the variety of contexts they work in, health professionals can perform an important function as information spreaders and opinion makers. In other words, they can act as a pressure group for promoting a global approach to health and, by elaborating more egalitarian health policies, become *de facto* activists in the promotion of the right to health and so help to remove the barriers to making the right to health a reality for all.

The project intends to pursue this objective, firstly, through investing in training and teaching on global health issues – at university level as well as in the field of lifelong learning.

Mapping of Italian university courses on global and international health has revealed that the current *curriculum* of Medicine and Surgery Faculties is too heavily focused on national and predominantly clinical aspects: *curricula* lack a global approach to health and do not adequately respond to the needs and challenges of a globalised world. Global health is mostly taught in elective courses and there is poor coordination regarding contents. In order to increase the number of courses and promote coordination, a proposal for a *curriculum* has been drawn up within the project, which includes six teaching modules, namely: Health and its determinants; The origins and development of health systems. Health as a human right; Globalisation and health; Inequalities in health and in health care assistance; Immigration and health; and, International health cooperation. Based on these contents, 20 new elective courses have been set up in various Italian Faculties of Medicine and Surgery.

As mentioned above, the project also promotes global health in the field of lifelong training through seminars and workshops held in Health Authorities and hospitals as well as in special sessions held during congresses of scientific and health societies and associations.

As well as intervening at the level of training, *Equal opportunities for health: action for development* has been and is also committed to raising awareness by organising trainings for local promoters and activists who, in their turn, are involved in organising workshops and awareness events. Also, by organising the International conference “*Equal opportunities for health: action for development*”. *A plan of action to advocate and teach global health*” (Padua, 03-04 April 2009) we succeeded in bringing academic and professional personnel together to create new synergies, strengthen partnerships and networks, and outline a plan of action to advocate and teach global health.

Furthermore, given the importance of disseminating information in order to mobilise public opinion communication activities are constantly underway. Among them, the translation of this Report which will be distributed through our partners’ and associates’ networks.

That the project has, and will have, an impact is ensured by the importance and influence of the partners involved: Italian Global Health Watch; Department of Medicine and Public Health, University of Bologna; Department of Public Health, University of Florence; Department of Environmental Medicine and Public Health, University of Padua; Department of Public Health and Microbiology,

University of Turin; Department of Internal and Specialist Medicine, University of Catania; Department of Experimental, Environmental Medicine and Biotechnology, University of Milan; IRCCS Burlo Garofolo; Italian Medical Students Secretariat; The Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom; the *Redemptoris Missio* Foundation, Poland; action medeor e.V., Germany; the Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine, Belgium; *Medicus Mundi* Spain; National Observatory of Residents in Paediatrics; IPASVI, Padova College of Nurses; the Doctors, Surgeons and Dentists Association of the Province of Padova; Padova Hospital Authority; and Doctors with Africa Cuamm support groups.

29 *partners* and associates who represent health communities in 6 EU member States (Italy, Germany, Poland, the UK, Belgium and Spain) all working together to promote an efficient exchange of knowledge, experience and good practises and to create new synergies at the European Level, as well as helping to develop the international consensus required to increase political and institutional support that, in its turn, will influence the way in which public health policies are elaborated and ensure that they will at last guarantee mental and social well-being for every human being, thus promoting a more equal world.

Serena Foresi and Elisabetta Bertotti

s.foresi@cuamm.org - globalhealth@cuamm.org

Doctors with Africa Cuamm

www.mediciconlafrica.org