BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences ASIA EDITION

Life expectancy gains worldwide: WHO

May 21, 2014 | Analysis | By BioSpectrum Bureau



Singapore: People everywhere are living longer, according to World Health Statistics 2014 and women are living longer than men with Japan, Spain and Singapore having longest life expectancy in the world at 87 years.

According to WHO's annual statistics report, low-income countries have made the greatest progress, with an average increase in life expectancy by nine years from 1990 to 2012. The top six countries where life expectancy increased the most were Liberia which saw a 20-year increase (from 42 years in 1990 to 62 years in 2012) followed by Ethiopia (from 45 to 64 years), Maldives (58 to 77 years), Cambodia (54 to 72 years), Timor-Leste (50 to 66 years) and Rwanda (48 to 65 years).

"An important reason why global life expectancy has improved so much is that fewer children are dying before their fifth birthday," says Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. "But there is still a major rich-poor divide: people in high-income countries continue to have a much better chance of living longer than people in low-income countries."

A boy born in 2012 in a high-income country can expect to live to the age of around 76 - 16 years longer than a boy born in a low-income country (age 60). For girls, the difference is even wider; a gap of 19 years separates life expectancy in high-income (82 years) and low-income countries (63 years).

The gap between male and female life expectancy is greater in high-income countries where women live around six years longer than men. In low-income countries, the difference is around three years. Female life expectancy in all the top 10 countries was 84 years or longer. Life expectancy among men is 80 years or more in nine countries, with the longest male life expectancy in Iceland, Switzerland and Australia.

"In high-income countries, much of the gain in life expectancy is due to success in tackling noncommunicable diseases," says Dr Ties Boerma, Director of the Department of Health Statistics and Information Systems at WHO. "Fewer men and women are dying before they get to their 60th birthday from heart disease and stroke. Richer countries have become better at monitoring and managing high blood pressure for example."