

Dr Henk Bekedam is the new WHO representative to India

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Dr Henk Bekedam is a Dutch national and a medical doctor by training. He acquired his MSc in Economics from the London School of Economics in 1996.

Having an overall experience of 29 years, he has worked for 19 years with the World Health Organization (WHO) as Representative in China and Egypt, Director of Health Sector Development in the WHO Western Pacific Region Office in Manila and as team leader of the health sector reform project in Cambodia. Before joining WHO, Dr Bekedam was seconded to governments in Zambia and Malawi.

Speaking of his new role, Dr Bekedam said, "It is a privilege to be in India. I am looking forward to building upon and further strengthening the excellent partnership that WHO has with the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and with other stakeholders."

"WHO India will continue to strive towards further strengthening health and equity in the country, as India takes major steps towards Universal Health Coverage," he added.

Dr Bekedam is happy to be back in Asia, where his work included supporting the Chinese government to successfully contain the SARS outbreak in 2003. This was one of his most impactful work as it not only led to a substantial increase in investment in public health, but also paved the way for universal health coverage in China.

"A similar outcome was seen in Egypt, where we assisted the national government to define a new vision of universal health coverage in response to the Constitution adopted in 2014, which gave more attention to health and education," he added. Dr Bekedam and the country office team also provided sound technical advice to the Egyptian government for an effective response to the largest outbreak of avian flu in humans and containing viral hepatitis C, including the expansion of the treatment programme. In addition, along with his team, he worked closely with the government to maintain the country's polio-free status.

Other areas of Dr Bekedam's strong expertise include, health system strengthening, Universal Health Coverage health sector

reforms, food safety, AIDS, tuberculosis, tobacco control and chronic diseases.