

AGENDA 21: PREPARING FOR 10 YEARS AFTER RIO

BACKGROUND

1. Agenda 21 is the global programme of action on sustainable development, which arose out of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which was held in Rio in 92.
2. Within WHO planning for UNCED started in 1990, with the appointment of a high level Commission headed by Mrs Simone Veil, to prepare WHO inputs.
3. This was intended to follow-up on the work of the World Commission on Environment and Development, headed by Dr Brundtland, also known as the Brundtland Commission, which had produced the landmark report Our Common Future.
4. It was here the term Sustainable Development was coined.
5. Sustainable development focuses on meeting the current and future needs of people in such a way that the capital stock is not depleted. This means addressing the **economic, social** and **environmental** dimensions of development in a balanced and integrated way.
6. WHO is task manager for Chapter 6 of Agenda 21, with responsibilities in certain areas such as primary health care/health systems, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, protecting vulnerable groups, urban health, environmental pollution, etc. WHO is also responsible for ensuring that the health dimensions of other chapters of Agenda 21 concerned with aspects of social and environmental development, are addressed.
7. WHO does this by participating in the work of the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which each year has a different thematic focus (this year it is on sustainable agriculture, land resources and trade/finance issues, in 2001 it is on sustainable energy, and transport, for example (see also attached reports on background to Agenda 21, including a global cabinet paper prepared in 2000, and a report on assessment of progress in the UN system regarding follow-up to UN conferences, prepared as input for an ECOSOC report in 2001).
8. Although Agenda 21 provides WHO with an extremely important entry point in dealing with the development agenda, back in 1992 inadequate attention was given to two key issues:
 - * WHO's advocacy and leveraging role in ensuring that other sectors' policies were pro-health.
 - * WHO's role in poverty alleviation and prevention
9. Regarding future responsibilities of WHO, the most pressing need is to put in place a process to prepare for Rio plus ten in 2002. A meeting of some selected UN agencies

and NGOs was recently held in the UK at Wilton Park, to start informal discussions. A copy of the talk delivered by the WHO representative is attached. There was overwhelming support for health to feature strongly in Rio + 10. In the fall of this year, the modalities and overall approach to the follow-up process will be agreed by the General Assembly. The formal preparatory process will get underway in early 2002. The key themes have not yet been agreed, but it is probable that poverty will be an important underlying focus. The venue has similarly not been agreed, but it is possible that South Africa could be the host. Negotiations are currently underway in this regard.

11. WHO is keen to initiate already in 2000, an institution-wide review of lessons learned over the past decade (ie “taking stock”);

*we would focus and showcase the new success stories following the approaches and practices we are now applying;

*we would highlight emerging new priorities in health and development for the next 10 years

12. This work would build on, and incorporate relevant aspects from the current corporate strategy development process, the work of the poverty and health task force, the planned follow-up to other UN conferences such as Copenhagen, Beijing, Istanbul and so on.

13. We intend to convene a small working group comprising a few departments at HQ, regional contact points, country representation, key collaborating centres and selected NGOs to prepare the work (see attached draft report of plans for the follow-up process). This would include a comprehensive report for presentation in 2002 by the DG. All regional offices have been asked to designate a contact point to liaise with HQ in this regard. The overall process is being coordinated through the Department of Health in Sustainable Development, where a specially designated Focal Point: Agenda 21, has been appointed.

14. In this way we would ensure a much sharper understanding of WHO’s role (relative to other UN agencies and NGOs) in supporting the health and poverty dimensions of sustainable development;

*and a commitment to support UNCED follow-up in a few well defined areas, to be decided.

15. One issue in particular we will be highlighting is that of household energy, and the huge health impact on women and children in developing countries throughout the world from the extremely high exposures from wood and coal burning.

Yasmin von Schirnding; Agenda 21 Focal Point