



To: Global Cabinet
From: Executive Director, Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments
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Topic: WHO Commitments under Chapter 6 of Agenda 21

Background

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Key outcomes of the Conference were the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; Agenda 21 - a global programme of action for sustainable development into the 21st century, and a number of specific conventions. Human health appears in the very first principle of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which states that:

“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature”.

Agenda 21

Agenda 21, the global programme of action for sustainable development, is of key significance to the work of WHO, in particular as it relates to its future work in situating health at the centre of the development agenda, with a strong focus on poverty alleviation. There are a number of chapters in Agenda 21, apart from Chapter 6 on health, where WHO can make a major contribution.

Section 1 for example deals with the Social and Economic Dimensions, including human health, but also covers areas dealing with combating poverty, changing consumption patterns, human settlement development and related issues. Section 2 is on Conservation and Management of Resources for Development (land, air, water, ecosystems etc), Section 3 is on Strengthening the Role of Major Groups (women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, NGOs, local authorities, business and industry), whilst Section 4 deals with means of implementation, for example financial resources and mechanisms, transfer of technology, capacity building, institutional arrangements, legal instruments and information for decision-making.

Commission on Sustainable Development

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), was established as a functional commission of ECOSOC, to review progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21, following the annual multi-thematic programme of work adopted at its first session in 1993. Each session has had a high level segment attended by a large number of ministers and high-level decision-makers from countries worldwide, and is increasingly taking the form of a dialogue on priority issues of concern. The Commission also provides a framework for a larger process of intersessional meetings, the year round activities being coordinated by the Bureau of the Commission.

Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development, and Task Manager System

The Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), was established in 1992 by the ACC, and has established a system of *task managers* responsible for various thematic areas corresponding to the individual chapters of Agenda 21. WHO is the task manager for Chapter 6. The overall role of the task manager is to assist IACSD in ensuring coordinated contributions of the UN system for the follow-up to, and implementation of, Agenda 21, in accordance with the multi-year thematic programme of work established by the CSD. Their main role is to promote and

facilitate better coordination, policy coherence and complementarity of action, to identify possibilities for joint initiatives, and to serve as the focal point for information and networking in respective thematic areas (see Annex 1 for further details).

Chapter 6 of Agenda 21

WHO, as the task manager for Chapter 6, has specific responsibilities in terms of health, which constitutes the main contribution of the organisation to Agenda 21. This is done mainly through the active participation of WHO in the CSD process, which focusses on specific themes on a yearly basis, and through the work of the IACSD, and its sub-committees. In 2000 the focus is on agriculture, forestry, land resources and trade/finance, whilst in 2001 the focus is on energy, transport, atmosphere and information for decision-making. 2002 will comprise a 10-year comprehensive review. WHO is actively involved in the preparations for these discussions.

Regarding Chapter 6 specifically, this contains five programme areas:

- Meeting primary health care needs, particularly in rural areas
- Control of communicable diseases
- Protecting vulnerable groups
- Meeting the urban health challenge
- Reducing health risks from environmental pollution and hazards.

In each of these sections, a number of objectives and specific activities to be carried out are listed. WHO, through its regional offices as well as through HQ, has been extremely active over many years in implementing Agenda 21, both in relation to Chapter 6 as well as in relation to other chapters. Most regions have been involved with the development of national environment and health action plans (NEHAPs), and, together with HQ, participated in the Rio+5 process, a highlight of which was the publication of the WHO report "Health and Environment in Sustainable Development: 5 Years after the Earth Summit".

Scope for Future Work

WHO will provide leadership to the CSD in the Rio+10 process by helping to ensure that health, and especially the health of the poor, is center-staged. This could be done by developing :

- a) a stronger knowledge base with regard to the key health objectives of Agenda 21;
- b) a series of succinct reports on major issues that require attention;
- c) a complete report for presentation by the DG to the Rio + 10 meeting.

In particular, WHO will demonstrate leadership in issues that intersect the health-environment-development divide, especially in selected neglected development issues (for example the impact of household energy usage on the health of the poor in developing countries). An important opportunity exists also to better link with the work of the Social Summit, and for WHO to synergise its efforts overall on poverty and health, drawing on the work of the newly established taskforce on health and poverty reduction.

CONCLUSION

The CSD process and Rio+10 provides a good mechanism for WHO to focus attention on the role of poverty alleviation and human health in sustainable development, working together in a concerted effort involving HQ and the regional offices.

Task manager functions for Agenda 21

- To strengthen and, where necessary, establish a network of collaboration among the relevant organisations and develop a regular flow of information on on-going and future activities among them, including through electronic networks
- To maintain intensive consultation and interaction among the various relevant agencies and associated institutions
- To initiate and play a catalytic function in joint activities and programmes relating to thematic issues
- To develop, in collaboration with the concerned organisations and secretariat of the CSD, common strategies for the implementation of the UN system of Agenda 21 in the thematic areas
- To prepare, in collaboration with concerned organisations, coordinated inputs for the consolidated analytical reports of the Secretary-General which will focus on common UN system strategies for the implementation of Agenda 21 and identify areas for further action for consideration by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

