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ACTION PLAN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND THE NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES

Report on a WHO
Consultation

Sofia, Bulgaria
19–22 October 1993

TARGET 18
POLICY ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

By the year 2000, all Member States should have developed, and be implementing, policies on the environment and health that ensure ecologically sustainable development, effective prevention and control of environmental health risks and equitable access to healthy environments.

ABSTRACT

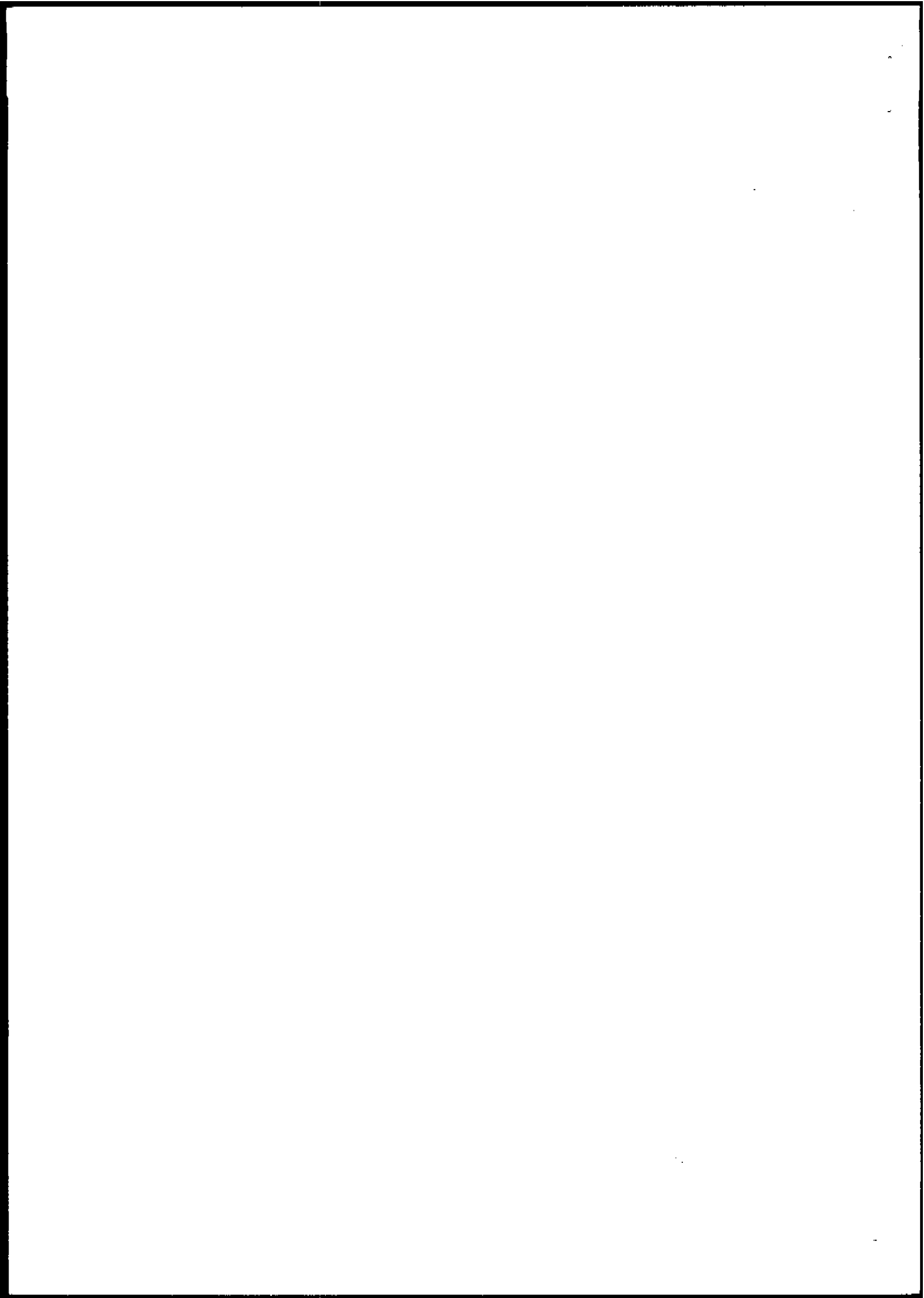
A WHO consultation was held in Sofia, Bulgaria from 19 to 22 October 1993 to discuss a proposed action plan for environmental health services in the countries of central and eastern Europe and the newly independent states. Participants from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Tajikistan and Ukraine attended. In plenary the meeting heard about the progress that had been achieved in relation to the publication on environmental health services. In the working group sessions, members were asked to consider three main issues: the content and format of the proposed volume describing environmental health services in the region; the underlying concepts proposed in the provisional Chapter 1 of the policy options document, and its content and format; and the draft action plan for environmental health services, in particular to suggest areas of action that could be translated into practical implementation at country, regional or local level. Some amendments were suggested, but in general the format and the main direction of the work on environmental health services was supported and encouraged. It was agreed that the three elements of description, analysis, and policy options should be retained within the publication. This information could be contained in two or three volumes. Finally, it was recommended that the Action Plan for Environmental Health Services should incorporate additional elements set out in the recommendations from the meeting.

Keywords

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
HEALTH SERVICES - trends
HEALTH PLANNING

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	
Technical Report	1
Tuesday, 19 October 1993	2
Wednesday, 20 October 1993	3
Observations	4
Thursday, 21 October 1993	6
Conclusion	7
Friday, 22 October 1993	8
Recommendations	8
Preamble	8
For International Organizations	8
For the Countries	10
List of participants	12



TECHNICAL REPORT

The Government of Bulgaria, assisted by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, hosted a Consultation Meeting on the Action Plan for Environmental Health Services in Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States. The meeting was held at the Boyana Residency in Sofia from 19 to 22 October 1993.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Environment of the Republic of Bulgaria addressed the participants of the meeting during the opening ceremony. The Prime Minister, Professor L. Berov recognized the importance of the meeting for developing relations of partnership between WHO/EURO and its member states. He acknowledged the input of the Health for All policy for developing the Bulgarian health policy.

Dr T. Gugalov, Minister of Health recognized the efforts of WHO/EURO to support countries of central and eastern Europe (CCEE) and the newly independent states (NIS). He emphasized the usefulness of setting coordinated action plans in different domains in order to allow member states of WHO/EURO to solve their problems at country level and at regional level. He reminded the participants that Bulgaria has endorsed, among others, the 8 targets related to environmental health and the Charter for Environment and Health. He acknowledged the work performed by his staff within the Ministry of Health and their colleagues from the Ministry of Environment to prepare the meeting and he expressed his satisfaction over the active and fruitful cooperation with WHO/EURO. He reiterated the importance of the meeting for CCEE and NIS. He concluded by describing the priority actions for the Government of Bulgaria;

- To develop intersectoriality by strengthening in a first phase the links between Ministries of Health and Environment;
- To improve the existing national monitoring system;
- To carry out epidemiological studies to explicit the links between environment and health;
- To increase public participation;
- To involve local authorities and NGOs.

In addition, Dr V. Bossevski, Minister of the Environment focused on the current environmental situation in Bulgaria which has too often affected the health of the population and the diversity of the nature and the quality of life. He expressed his appreciation for the good and efficient ongoing cooperation with the Minister of Health and wished that it could even increase in the future. He gave an overview of the new methodology adopted for setting standards in Bulgaria which are of primary concern when taking into consideration the human health aspects. He acknowledged the need for expanded research in this area.

Dr J.E. Asvall, Regional Director of WHO/EURO, gave some examples of how man-made disasters or bad environmental management can have catastrophic consequences on

human health. He stressed the need of focusing our efforts towards the underprivileged and the most poor. He recalled the terrible consequences of wars on the health of the populations and on the environment. He suggested that the participants should take into consideration the Rio Declaration in setting their own environmental health plans. He expressed his gratitude to the government of Bulgaria and proposed that all participants and governments will have consider the action plan for environment and health which will be adopted in Helsinki in June 1994 as their "Concern for Europe's Tomorrow"(CET). The meeting was then declared opened.

Dr. S.Tarkowski, Director of the Environment and Health Department, WHO/EURO, requested Mr. X. Bonnefoy, Regional Adviser for Environmental Health Planning/Ecology, WHO/EURO, to present the scope and purpose of the meeting.

The objective of the meeting was described as four-fold :

1. Analyse the draft of the summary reports of the surveys of environmental health services carried out under the auspices of WHO/EURO and to propose comments.
2. Analyse and comment upon the proposed policy options document with special attention to the Concepts chapter.
3. Enrich the action plan for environmental health services with specific requirements for CCEE/NIS.
4. Discuss the major institutional and other existing problems in the represented member states for improving the action plan for environmental health for Europe which will be adopted in June 1994 in Helsinki.

Dr Tarkowski proceeded to the election of the board of the meeting. Dr M. Haralanova, Director General of Health , Health Promotion and State Sanitary Control Department, Ministry of Health, Bulgaria was elected Chairperson; Dr L. Selfo, Head of the Environmental Protection Committee, Albania, as Vice-Chairperson and Dr J. Ptashekas, Director of the Institute of Environmental Medicine, Lithuania, as Rapporteur.

The meeting was attended by 25 participants from 21 countries, as well as representatives of the United Nations Development Programme and the Commission of the European Communities, 10 temporary advisers, 9 WHO staff members, the WHO Liaison Officer in Sofia and 3 administrative support staff from the host country.

The agenda of the meeting was unanimously approved, and responsible officers were selected and elected.

It was agreed that the meeting will proceed both in plenary sessions, and in working groups.

Tuesday, 19 October 1993

The introduction to the Second European Conference on Environment and Health and the Action Plan document was delivered by Dr. D. Kello, Coordinator, Second European Conference on Environment and Health, WHO/EURO. Preparatory phases for the Helsinki Conference, milestones of the evolution of the various concepts i.e., Resolutions of Rio,

European Charter on Environment and Health, WHO HFA Programme, etc., the importance of developing a new strategy for a successful environment and health management in the European Region were the main issues of the introductory presentation.

A report on progress of the Environmental Health Services project including the issues for considerations and discussions during the meeting was presented by Mr. X. Bonnefoy. A new definition of Environmental Health was proposed, entire project stages described, problem areas in the field of environmental health management illustrated and points for action through an overview of the different existing systems of environmental health management in European countries today, were clearly pointed out by the contributors.

Mr. I. MacArthur, Short-term Professional, WHO/EURO, was given the floor to present the terms of references of the two working groups: Working Group 1 (Russian speaking), and Working Group 2 (English speaking). It was stressed that the selection of groups was based on translation issues only, and that it creates artificial groupings. For the first session in working groups, the terms of reference of the two groups were identical.

The working groups were asked to consider;

1. The proposed content and format of the Descriptive Volume on environmental health services. In order to give the working group members a clearer understanding of this publication, the first draft of Chapter 3 of the Descriptive Volume was provided as working document. (ICP/CEH 123/10).
2. The proposed format and value to Member States, of the second volume presenting a comparative analysis of environmental health services. In particular members of the working groups were requested to consider whether it was necessary to produce two separate documents or if it was permissible to produce the description and comparative analysis within the same volume.
3. Comments from working group members on how these proposed volumes could be improved, including the insertion of additional chapter headings or the reduction in the emphasis of others, and how useful they are likely to be with member states were particularly welcomed.

The officers for the working groups were selected. Dr Y. Uzunov, Deputy Minister of the Environment (Bulgaria) and Dr J. Ptashekas (Lithuania) were appointed as Chairperson and Rapporteur respectively for Group 1. Dr H. Isnard, Ministère des Affaires sociales de la santé (France) and Mr G. Jukes, Under Secretary, Institution of Environmental Health Officers (United Kingdom) as Chairperson and Rapporteur respectively for Group 2.

Wednesday, 20 October 1993.

The meeting received debriefing from the working groups by the rapporteurs. Mr G. Jukes and Dr J. Ptashekas presented the main conclusions and proposals given by the groups regarding format, content and value of the descriptive and comparison volumes of the report on Environmental Health Services in Europe.

By the participants of Working Group 1 it was unanimously proposed:

1. To approve a one-single volume format which contains descriptive information and comparison analysis after each of the chapters;
2. To approve content of the proposed document after adding some of the new headings and editorial text improvement;
3. To emphasize the significant value of proposed publications for elaboration of individual action plans for environmental health services in the newly independent states.

By the participants of Working Group 2 it was unanimously proposed :

1. The group agreed that a comparative analysis in a second volume using grid analysis would be an extremely helpful second volume and that it need not be longer than fifty pages;
2. International and global dimensions need to be a separate aspect and included in the report;
3. Whilst it is accepted that the chapter three document is an example there do need to be a clear summary conclusion and a recommendation sections;
4. It would be helpful if the volumes indicated goals to be achieved and the mechanism for achieving them;
5. It would be valuable to include in the volumes, information about networking of laboratories, comparability of data, and quality control;
6. While the contents cover many aspects there is no specific mention of the management of environmental health services which was considered to be an important element and should be included;
7. Where there are statements in existence by WHO on health risk communication and health risk management they should be included as such in the text of the volumes at the appropriate place;
8. A section on the implications of external influential legislation e.g., EC Directives and how they affect the practices within countries should be included;
9. There should be a section on the effective use of press, public relations and the dissemination of information.

Observations

It was recognized that the volume headings contained within the Salindres Report may cover many of the aspects commented upon above.

Mr X.Bonnefoy forwarded comments and proposals on the issues presented by the Working Groups. The matters of communication networks, quality control , cost-effectiveness evaluations, staff-estimates and format and content would be taken forward for consideration in the documents.

The plenary session then was addressed by the following speakers :

A short presentation of the policy options document and on the plan for Environmental Health Services was then delivered by Mr I. MacArthur. The main policy options, issues on definition, objectives, social factors, democratic principles, sustainable development, intersectorality and international cooperation were discussed in detail.

A presentation of the overall Environmental Health Action Plan for Europe was made by Dr F. Sella, (Switzerland). The activity of the Task Force, issues of grouping problems in the field of environmental health, country participation were all discussed. It was also pointed out that this Action Plan for Europe has to be approved by the governments of individual member states.

Action proposals and key concepts for development of Environmental Health Services was submitted by Mr I. MacArthur (WHO/EURO).

Dr M.Proctor, Dublin College of Catering (Ireland) made a presentation on Action Plan in the field of educational development based on experience in Ireland. Background issues, important considerations and possible models were reflected and actively discussed at the meeting.

The afternoon session proceeded with the participants again splitting into English and Russian speaking working groups in order to discuss the Preliminary Draft of the Action Plan for individual countries with the following terms of reference:

Working Group 3:

1. The underlying concepts proposed in the provisional Chapter 1 (distributed at the meeting in English only).
2. The proposed content and format of the 'guidelines' volume on policy options for environmental health services.
3. Particular areas within the 'guidelines' volume which should be further strengthened for the needs of countries of central and eastern Europe and the newly independent states.

Working Group 4 :

1. The proposed content of the preliminary draft Action Plan for environmental health services.(ICP/CEH/123/6).

2. Additional areas for action which are not highlighted in the preliminary draft action plan.
3. How the suggested areas of action can be translated into practical implementation at country, regional and local level.
4. Any concrete proposals for country projects or intercountry activities were welcomed.

Thursday, 21 October 1993

During debriefing from the Working Groups, the Rapporteurs Messrs Jukes and Ptashekas reflected the main issues discussed during the meetings and delivered proposals on underlying concepts, content, implementation, definitions, inaccuracies, clarity, glossary, style, missing areas, added areas, and proposals for concrete country projects.

The participants of Working Group 1 agreed on the following points:

1. The proposed content of the preliminary draft of the Action Plan reflects major areas in environmental health services;
2. In terms of including additional areas it was proposed to add a chapter on Environmental Health Services and Global Disasters;
3. Implementation of the Actions in the Newly Independent States would probably be introduced via the process of decentralization in environmental health services management;
4. Proposals for the country projects in the field of environmental health management are the following:
 - 5.* Elaboration of legislation
 - 6.* Training of professionals
 - 7.* Development of good laboratory practice
 - 8.* Environmental health information management

Participants of Working Group 2 agreed on the following :

1. The meeting congratulated the author of the document for its content and first class presentation.
2. Definition: It is important and essential to finalize the definition as soon as possible as it is the key element of the report. The existing definition needs to define environmental health. There is some confusion throughout the document and a mixing of the terms between environmental health and environmental health services.

3. Glossary: in order to improve the understanding of the document's meaning it is essential that a comprehensive glossary and definition of terms is provided.
4. Inaccurate assumptions: There were some inaccurate assumptions made in the text which needed to be altered.
5. Style and structure: While the content and style of the current report was good it could be improved by taking its base concept, currently in the body of the text, and highlighting it at each section. The discussion and argument justifying it would then follow on. This would have two effects :
 - i)- It would enable the document to be easier to read and comprehend.
 - ii)- It would improve its "usability".
6. Clarity: There was some mixing in the text of elements relating to quality of life and sustainability. The previous comments made would help to address the confusion.
7. Missing areas: environmental health impact assesement is a useful tool in ensuring intersectorality.

Conclusion

The document is a good practical tool for addressing the concepts and has considerable practical use in assisting the development of policies and actions.

Mr X. Bonnefoy, giving comments on the proposals, identified the importance of the definition, glossary, issues of sustainability, disaster preparedness, and reflected on the relationship to the outputs of the CET Project.

During the discussion, the participants noted the importance of pre-investment studies, consideration of the global issues, development of good laboratory practice and other issues.

The Pan-European Plan of Action was then presented by Dr D. Kello. It showed that two main documents are to be produced for the Environment and Health Conference in Helsinki: The Action Plan for Europe which is going to be considered by the ministers of health and environment attending the conference and the Plan of Action for the Improvement of Environmental Health Services in CCEE/NIS. This document has to be firstly approved by professionals.

A summary report on the background documents obtained for individual states in terms of environmental health management had been presented by Mr G. Jukes. The basic tasks, purpose, constraints, regional summaries and the "economic levels " management principle were presented and discussed. It was noted that member states have to actively participate in the approval of presented drafts of the report documents.

The meeting then received a presentation from Mr W. Goldbeck (WHO/EURO) on the economic investment strategies and options for environmental health and environmental health services in CCEE/NIS.

Small working groups for the synthesis of what had been proposed during the meeting was formed.

In the afternoon country representatives were invited to present to the meeting their priorities for action in the area of environmental health management.

Friday 22 October 1993.

During the first half the morning country representatives who have not had time to deliver their short presentation on Thursday were invited to take the floor.

The rapporteur gave then the conclusions of the meeting which are as follows :

- The meeting endorsed the general proposals (with amendments) for the production of the planned documents on Environmental Health Services, and noted in particular, their practical value for member states.
- The meeting arrived at a consensus that the three elements of description, analysis and policy options should be retained within the publications. This information could be contained in two or three volumes.
- It was also recommended that the Action Plan for Environmental Health Services should incorporate additional elements as set out in the recommendations. (See below)

Recommendations

The participants have then adopted the following recommendations :

Preamble

Peace in countries and among countries is an absolute prerequisite for health. All participants acknowledged that there were too many countries at war in the region and recognized that all efforts should be undertaken to reach peace in the best possible delays. These efforts must be given the highest possible priority.

For International Organizations

1. International organizations and non-governmental organizations should strengthen their cooperation in CCEE/NIS in order to obtain a synergy in the implementation of their work in the area of environmental health.
2. WHO should provide for the Helsinki Conference a definition of environmental health and environmental health services.
3. WHO/EURO should modify and finalize the following documents according to the guidance given during the meeting by the participants and in the general direction which has been proposed by WHO/EURO:

- Environmental Health Services Description and Comparative Analysis
- Environmental Health Services Policy Options

4. Man made and natural disasters preparedness should be considered as an important subject for involving environmental health services at country and local levels.
5. The actions proposed in the action plan for environmental health should be drafted in such a way that they can be used by countries according to their policies, existing needs, and resources and should not constitute a prescriptive list of requirements.
6. The policy options document for environmental health services should provide clear and practical alternatives based on well designed concepts and clearly expressed criteria such as cost benefit analysis, institutional requirements, human resources needs, etc.
7. To assist the member states to identify means for action plan implementation according to approved set up of priorities. Political, economic, and managerial issues and the available capacity in each country are to be strongly evaluated and taken into consideration.
8. To assist the member states from CCEE/NIS and Baltic Region in establishing systems for international exchange in the field of environmental health. This could be related to the Health For All database.
9. To identify a list of possible project proposals based on international cooperation in order to proceed with the implementation of individual action plans by the member states of the region.
10. To establish a strategic cooperation with international, public and private sector funding organizations in order to ensure indispensable support for the member states which are in the process of implementing environmental health services action plan. Investment in environment and health should be based on principles of increasing states' self reliance and sustainable development.
11. The action plan should not neglect the environmental health problems which have been caused by wars and other instabilities in the region. These are creating a huge influx of refugees. Many basic hygiene problems and the transmission of communicable diseases are closely linked to these problems.
12. Action plans should appreciate the mitigation of hazards identified in environmental health area in some countries which were caused by negligence of previous regimes, underlining that any measures applied today are requiring huge investments, such as the unsafe nuclear power plants, industrial complexes without any protection from pollution, etc.
13. The action plan should respect that most of the countries currently in transition are faced with major economic problems. These countries have also many evident environmental health problems which will require investments and/or reorganization of the existing environmental health services infrastructure. It will be necessary therefore, in these countries, for a 'step wise' approach to be adopted. The first stage will concentrate on

cost effective measures and on the improvement of existing environmental health services.

- 14 WHO/EURO should study the possibility of establishing one or more centers of excellence in environmental health for post graduate training.
- 16 Whenever countries request the participation of WHO staff to inform or train local staff, WHO/EURO should give this request a high priority and should try to identify human resources in neighbour countries.

For the Countries

- 17 In countries where the process of decentralization is taking place, it should give opportunity for reorientating and reorganizing environmental health services.
- 18 In their choice of priorities for action, education and training should be listed high on the agenda in order to set the basis of a sufficient knowledge of communities and adequate skills of professionals.
- 19 Countries should consider utilizing the HFA principles, targets and indicators for setting their own targets and indicators. This will then allow them to draft and disseminate clear strategies to the public.
- 20 To continue actively participating in the preparatory work for the final report on Environmental Health Services in Europe. Therefore, contributions of additional information and comments on the entire report document is strongly encouraged.
- 21 The countries should develop their Environmental Health Services according to the basic principles of the Action Plan including adequate environmental health investment issues.
- 22 To set specifically for each Member State their own priorities in distinct areas of action, that may vary from country to country.
- 23 To identify needs and level of assistance from international organizations in the process of implementation of the individual actions.
- 24 To evaluate their own resources and identify areas and proposals for possible inter-country, country, regional projects in the field of environmental health management.
- 25 To validate the proposed pan-European Report Documents and Action Plan for CCEE and NIS with their governments before the pre-Helsinki Conference meeting for the governments in March 1993.
- 26 All countries should consider the use of different economic models and concepts as an essential tool in creating more efficient environmental health services integrating part their cost within economical markets. They should also consider the use of environmental health improvement technologies and activities as "tools" of future economic and employment development.

- 27 All countries should validate analysis material as soon as possible to assist WHO in the preparation for the Helsinki Conference.

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