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INCORPORATING HEALTH-AND-
ENVIRONMENT IN SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION BY
WHO COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

Health-and-Environment Programmes
World Health Organization
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INCORPORATING HEALTH-AND-ENVIRONMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION BY THE WHO REPRESENTATIVES

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in June 1992 set in motion machinery to bring about environmentally sound and sustainable development. This provides both a challenge and opportunity for WHO and the health sector to ensure that health-and-environment imperatives are being adequately addressed by on-going national planning and programme development mandated by UNCED.

WHO has been very active internationally in preparing for and participating at the UNCED as well as in its follow-up. The attached paper "WHO Global Strategy for Health-and-Environment and Related Events" provides background information on WHO's role and efforts.

Since UNCED, various degrees of progress have been made in national planning and implementing procedures for sustainable development. In many countries, interministerial committees or commissions have been set up to ensure intersectoral participation and partnership in planning. In some countries, this effort is being assisted by UNDP's Capacity 21 Programme. Other agencies such as the World Bank, FAO, UNEP, etc. are also providing support.

WHO, in cooperation with UNDP's Capacity 21 Programme, is currently supporting initiatives in 10 countries to incorporate health-and-environment considerations in national plans for sustainable development. Similar initiatives will be undertaken in other countries in 1995 and 1996. A guideline for national governments based on the experience gained so far is being prepared and should be available by mid-1995.

There is an immediate need for each and every country to consider health-and-environment issues in planning for sustainable development. The WHO Representative

Health-and-Environment Imperatives in Sustainable Development Examples

- requirements for environmental health impact assessment of industrial and agricultural developments
 - comprehensive approaches for water supply and sanitation to include hygiene education, operation and maintenance and health surveillance
 - development of health based legislation and regulations for the protection of air, water and food
 - proper management of medical and other hazardous wastes
 - establishment of linkages of environmental data with information on health consequences
 - incorporation of health measures in contingency planning for chemical and other accidents
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and his/her staff can play an influential and facilitating role in this process. Suggestions for types of activities which could be pursued include:

(1) Promoting and supporting the participation of the Ministry of Health in national planning for sustainable development

- "acquainting" the relevant staff of the Ministry with Agenda 21
- reviewing the involvement of the Ministry of Health in "post UNCED" organizational structures for sustainable development, i.e. interministerial committees, and where necessary promote its participation in such mechanisms
- promoting within the Ministry of Health the need to establish and maintain close cooperation with other Ministries and sectors whose activities may impact health through encouragement of joint meetings and implementation of joint activities
- collaborating with the Ministry of Health in assessing its technical and financial capacity to address health-and-environment issues and in supporting the strengthening of "environmental health units" within the Ministry
- providing guidance to the Ministry in identifying and setting priorities for action on health-and-environment, and if appropriate to initiate preparation of a health-and-environment section for the national plans on sustainable development
- advising the Regional Office and headquarters on the degree of involvement of and difficulties facing Ministries of Health in sustainable development planning and on the information and types of support which should be provided to the Ministry to strengthen its participation in the planning process

(2) Establishing contacts with other Ministries and government departments to "sensitize" them to health-and-environment issues and involve them in addressing those aspects of relevance to them

- working with the Ministry of Environment to establish a strong partnership on health-and-environment activities
- influencing planning ministries (economic planning, physical land-use planning, etc.) to integrate health-and-environment issues in economic development policies and plans

- identifying ministries such as housing, public works, agriculture, energy and industry where health-and-environment dimensions could be addressed, and promoting joint work with Ministries of Health
 - providing information and support on health-and-environment issues
- (3) Participating with UNDP and others in international efforts to support planning and action for sustainable development
- establishing close cooperation with UNDP, its Capacity 21 Programme, and its environmental activities
 - participating in "round tables" with relevant UN Agencies, regional organizations and bilaterals concerned with sustainable development planning and implementation to bring health issues to the forefront and present health-and-environment information and data on local/national conditions
 - using the Country Strategy Note as a means of gaining official support for linking health-and-environment in planning for sustainable development
 - establishing bilateral relationships with other Agencies, donors and NGOs whose programmes include activities relevant to health-and-environment concerns

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