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NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS - RELATIONS
AT REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
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1. INTRODUCTION

WHO's collaboration with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) dates back to 1948, when the first World Health Assembly adopted a statement of principles regarding working relations with NGOs. Thus from the very inception, the important contribution of NGOs to health development as well as the potential value of NGOs' support in the promotion of worldwide application of the principles of the Constitution of WHO, had been recognized.

The strong input and the potential role of NGOs were further emphasized at the time of the Alma-Ata Declaration in 1978, when a position paper on the role of NGOs in primary health care was elaborated by a NGO group. Following this, four main areas, with special reference to the role of NGOs in the formulation and promotion of strategies for Health for All by the Year 2000, have emerged: (a) people's participation; (b) communication/health education; (c) joint planning, and (d) coordination.

2. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY WHO

The role of NGOs in support of national, regional and global strategies for health for all, was further emphasized inter alia in the World Health Assembly resolution WHA33.17.

At the Fourth Meeting of Ministers of Health of the countries of the WHO South-East Asia Region in New Delhi, India, in September 1984, it was agreed that NGOs constituted a valuable resource and played a significant role in promoting health care. If properly tapped, they could be valuable allies and partners in the process of health development. A follow-up report on the further development of this issue in the Region was submitted to the Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Health in Sri Lanka in November 1985. The Ministers agreed that steps would be taken to fully exploit the potential and supportive role of NGOs in motivating, involving and mobilizing community support for the implementation of the national health-for-all strategies.

Technical discussions on the topic of "Collaboration with non-governmental organizations in implementing the Global Strategy for Health for All" were held during the Thirty-eighth World Health Assembly in 1985. The overriding conclusion that emerged out of these discussions was that there is a growing awareness of the role and partnership between governments, WHO and NGOs and that this was a necessity for the attainment of the social goal of Health for All by the Year 2000. Following the Technical Discussions, the Assembly adopted a resolution (WHA38.31), which highlighted the need for joint efforts by all parties involved, i.e., international, regional and national NGOs, governments and WHO. The discussions identified four main areas for continuous action:

- (1) Stimulating governments, WHO and NGOs to critically review the current status of mutual collaboration within the context of the Global Strategy for Health for All;

- (2) Clarifying the role of NGOs at all levels - national, regional and global - in the implementation of health-for-all strategies, especially with regard to promoting community involvement;
- (3) Determining priority action needed to develop and strengthen a partnership approach through innovative mechanisms to facilitate the dialogue and enhance joint efforts, and
- (4) Identifying ways and means by which WHO, in collaboration with other agencies, can provide active support to further promote the involvement of NGOs in health-for-all strategies.

3. VIEWS OF COUNTRIES OF SEAR

At the seventy-fifth session of the Executive Board, a resolution (EB75.R.13) was adopted requesting the Director-General of WHO "to undertake a review of current guidelines as Outlined in the Working Principles Governing the Admission of Nongovernmental Organizations into Official Relations with WHO". The Member States of the Region were consulted in this matter and consolidated comments were submitted to the Director-General, which may be summarized as follows:

- (1) There is general support and increasing awareness of the need for NGOs' participation in the implementation of the Global Strategy for Health for All.
- (2) It does not seem necessary to change the current guidelines, which still seem very valid in the light of the present situation:
 - There is only a limited number of international NGOs with a regional structure in the South-East Asia Region.
 - The majority of the national NGOs are affiliated to international federations in official relations with WHO. The national affiliates are thus considered to enjoy the same official relations through the parental body.
- (3) NGOs that exist in most of the countries of the Region (e.g., Red Cross/Crescent Societies, nursing and medical associations, etc.) could, however, be encouraged to nominate focal points for contact with the Regional Office of WHO.
- (4) The Regional Office could more systematically disseminate WHO information material and documents that are of interest to NGOs. Further, it could give more publicity to WHA resolutions, policy decisions and documents in order to orient NGOs with WHO and government policies and strategies.
- (5) The Regional Office could increasingly involve NGOs in relevant WHO-sponsored meetings and programmes and utilize their expertise to a greater extent through the mechanism of hiring their services as short-term consultants, and on contractual service agreements, technical service agreements, etc. It should also be possible for WHO, with the concurrence of the

respective government, to involve NGOs in health services research and in the promotion of various primary health care activities.

- (6) At country and regional levels, WHO, in collaboration with the governments, could give greater support to NGOs and assist them in preparing inventories of their activities and in organizing workshops, seminars, etc.
- (7) WHO should preferably include other UN agencies like UNICEF, UNDP, etc., in its relationship with NGOs.
- (8) Every effort should be made by the WPC&Rs to increase the collaboration and involvement of NGOs in health activities. However, this should be done only through the national councils/associations and in consultation with the government authorities concerned.

The comments of the regions were taken into consideration by the EB Standing Committee on Nongovernmental Organizations and a revised, expanded version of the Working Principles was prepared to bring them in line with the resolution WHA38.31. The revised Working Principles may be seen at Annex 1.

4. ACTION POINTS FOR THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

In January 1986, the seventy-seventh session of the Executive Board endorsed the revised Working Principles Governing Relations with NGOs with the exception of one section (Section 5) concerning relations with NGOs at regional and national levels. The Executive Board requested the regional committees to consider these general principles at their 1986 sessions and to expand them as necessary for establishing relations with regional and national NGOs and to report the results of their discussions to the Board at its seventy-ninth session. At this session, the Board would finalize its recommendations on the Working Principles relating to global, regional and national NGOs and submit them to the Fortieth World Health Assembly in May 1987.

In order to elicit the views of the Regional Committee on the mechanisms within the framework of Section 5 of the revised Working Principles to ensure an increasing role for NGOs in regional and national efforts for implementing health-for-all strategies, a number of issues have been identified (Annex 2). The Regional Committee may wish to consider these issues and make necessary recommendations in relation to both "working relations" and "formal relations" with NGOs. In making the recommendations, the Regional Committee may wish to consider the "possible responses" given in the second column, which are offered only as suggestions.

RELATIONS WITH NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Working Principles¹

(As revised by the Standing Committee on Nongovernmental Organizations)

1. Introduction

1.1 As stated in Article 2 of the Constitution, one of the main functions of the World Health Organization (WHO) is to act as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work. In support of this function, and in accordance with Article 71 of the Constitution, WHO may make suitable arrangements for consultation and cooperation with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in carrying out its international health work.

1.2 WHO should, in relation to NGOs, act in conformity with any relevant resolutions of the General Assembly or Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

1.3 The objectives of WHO's collaboration with NGOs are to promote the policies, strategies and programmes derived from the decisions of the Organization's governing bodies; to collaborate with various WHO programmes in jointly agreed activities to implement these strategies; and to play an appropriate role in ensuring the harmonizing of intersectoral interests among the various sectoral bodies concerned in a country, regional or global setting.

2. Types of relations at the global level

2.1 WHO recognizes only one category of formal relations, known as official relations, with NGOs which meet the criteria described in these Working Principles.

2.2 The establishment of relations with NGOs shall be an evolving process proceeding through a number of separate stages as described in the following paragraphs.

2.3 First contacts with an NGO in order to create mutual understanding and assist in developing mutual interests frequently take the form of exchanges of information and reciprocal participation in technical meetings. This type of informal contact may continue on an ad hoc basis, without time limit and without written agreement. However, the definition of the broad objectives of collaboration and the possibility of enlarging its scope to include specific joint activities in line with the particular expertise of the nongovernmental organization are also explored at this stage.

2.4 When a number of specific joint activities have been identified, collaboration may be taken a stage further by proceeding to a period (usually two years) of working relations entered into by an exchange of letters. Such letters set out the agreed basis for the collaboration, indicating details of the activities to be undertaken during the period, providing an estimate of the resources to be supplied by WHO and the NGO, and naming focal points in the NGO and in WHO (designated technical officer). A joint assessment of the outcome of the collaboration thus planned is undertaken at the end of the period of working relations by all parties concerned, including also consideration of the future relationship. This may result in the continuation of the working relations for a further period; in an application for admission into official relations with WHO from an international NGO, for examination by the Executive Board, should there be a number of activities which might form the basis of a long-term and closer relationship with WHO; or in a decision that there is no scope for further contacts in the foreseeable future. This arrangement for consultation and cooperation with NGOs at the global level is considered as informal.

¹ For easy comparison those sections which differ from the current Working Principles, or have been added, have been indicated by a line in the margin.

2.5 The Executive Board shall be responsible for deciding on the admission of NGOs into official relations with WHO.

3. Criteria for the admission of NGOs into official relations with WHO

3.1 The main area of competence of the NGO shall fall within the purview of WHO. Its aims and activities shall be in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of WHO, shall centre on development work in health or health-related fields, and shall be free from concerns which are primarily of a commercial or profit-making nature. The major part of its activities shall be relevant to and have a bearing on the implementation of the health-for-all strategies as envisaged in the Global Strategy for Health for All by the year 2000 and the WHO General Programme of Work covering a Specific Period.

3.2 The NGO shall normally be international in its structure and/or scope, and shall represent a substantial proportion of the persons globally organized for the purpose of participating in the particular field of interest in which it operates. When there are several international NGOs with similar areas of interest, they may form a joint committee or other body authorized to act for the group as a whole.

3.3 The NGO shall have a constitution or similar basic document, an established headquarters, a directing or governing body, an administrative structure at various levels of action, and authority to speak for its members through its authorized representatives. Its members shall exercise voting rights in relation to its policies or action.

3.4 Thus, organizations eligible for admission into official relations with WHO include various types of international NGOs with a federated structure (made up of national or regional groups or having individual members derived from different countries), foundations that raise resources for health development activities in different parts of the world, and similar bodies promoting international health.

3.5 In exceptional cases a national organization, whether or not affiliated to an international NGO, may be considered for admission into official relations, in consultation with and subject to the recommendations of the WHO regional director and the Member State involved. Such a national organization (or a number of national organizations working under a federated (umbrella) structure) shall be eligible for admission provided that: the major part of its activities and resources are directed towards international health and related work; it has developed a programme of collaborative activities with WHO as indicated in paragraph 2.4; and its activities offer appropriate experience upon which WHO may wish to draw.

3.6 There shall normally have been at least two years of successfully completed working relations, as described in paragraph 2.4, prior to an application for admission into official relations.

4. Procedure for admitting NGOs into official relationship with WHO

4.1 Applications should normally reach WHO headquarters not later than the month of July in order to be considered by the Executive Board in January of the following year. They shall specify a structured framework for collaborative activities agreed upon by the organization and WHO. Applications from national organizations shall contain the endorsements of the WHO regional director and the Government of the Member State concerned. Applications should normally be transmitted to Board members by the Secretariat two months in advance of the session at which they will be considered.

4.2 During its January session, the Board's Standing Committee on Nongovernmental Organizations, composed of five members, shall consider applications submitted by NGOs, voluntarily or by invitation, and shall make recommendations to the Board; it may invite any such organization to speak before it in connection with the organization's application. Should the applicant organization be considered not to meet the established criteria, and bearing in mind the desirability of ensuring a valuable continuing partnership based on defined objectives and evidenced by a record of successful past collaboration and a framework for future collaborative activities, the Standing Committee may recommend postponement of consideration or rejection of an application.

4.3 The Board, after considering the recommendations of the Standing Committee, shall decide whether an organization is to be admitted into official relations with WHO. A re-application from an NGO shall not normally be considered until two years have elapsed since the Board's decision on the original application.

4.4 The Director-General shall inform each organization of the Board's decision on its application. The Director-General shall maintain a list of the organizations admitted into official relations and this list and any amendments thereto shall be circulated to the Members of WHO.

4.5 The Board, through its Standing Committee on Nongovernmental Organizations, shall review collaboration with each NGO every three years and shall determine the desirability of maintaining official relations. The Board's review of NGOs shall be spread over a three-year period, one-third being reviewed each year.

4.6 The Board may discontinue official relations if it considers that such relations are no longer appropriate or necessary in the light of changing programmes or other circumstances. Similarly, the Board may suspend or discontinue official relations if an organization no longer meets the criteria that applied at the time of the establishment of such relations, or fails to fulfil its part in the agreed programme of collaboration.

5. Relations at the regional and national levels

5.1 Regional or national NGOs affiliated to international NGOs in official relations with WHO

These NGOs are, by definition, in official relations with the WHO regional office(s). They shall develop and implement a programme of collaboration with the regional and national levels of WHO to ensure implementation of health-for-all strategies at the country level.

5.2 Regional and national NGOs for which there is no international NGO

The regional office concerned may establish working relations with these organizations, subject to consultation with the Member State(s) concerned and between the regional director and the Director-General of WHO. A programme of activities developed and implemented as described in paragraph 2.4 shall be essential.

5.3 Regional or national NGOs affiliated to international NGOs not in official relations with WHO

In order that WHO may promote and support the formation of strong international NGOs in the various technical fields, the regional office concerned may establish informal working relations with the above-mentioned regional or national organizations. Such informal working relations shall be based on a programme of activities developed and implemented as described in paragraph 2.4.

6. Privileges conferred on NGOs by relationship with WHO

6.1 The privileges conferred by official relationship shall include:

(1) The right to appoint a representative to participate, without right of vote, in WHO's meetings or in those of the committees and conferences convened under its authority, on the following conditions:

Whenever the Health Assembly, a committee or conference convened under its authority discusses an item in which a related NGO is particularly interested, that NGO, at the invitation of the chairman of the meeting or on his/her acceding to a request from the organization, shall be entitled to make a statement of an expository nature, and may, with the consent of the meeting, be invited by the chairman to make, in the course of the discussion of the item before the meeting, an additional statement for purposes of clarification;

(ii) Access to non-confidential documentation and such other documentation as the Director-General may see fit to make available through such special distribution facilities as WHO may establish;

(iii) The right to submit a memorandum to the Director-General, who would determine the nature and scope of the circulation.

6.2 In the event of a memorandum being submitted which the Director-General considers might be placed on the agenda of the Health Assembly, such memorandum will be placed before the Executive Board for possible inclusion in the agenda of the Assembly.

6.3 Privileges similar to those stated above shall normally be accorded to national/regional NGOs having working relations with WHO regional offices, in accordance with section 5.2, as determined by the regional directors in consultation with the regional committees.

6.4 A national organization which is affiliated to an international NGO covering the same subject on an international basis shall normally present its views through its government or through the international NGO to which it is affiliated, unless other arrangements are made in view of its particular relationship with WHO.

7. Responsibilities of NGOs in their relationship with WHO

7.1 NGOs shall be responsible for implementing the mutually agreed programme of collaboration and shall inform WHO as soon as possible if for any reason they are unable to fulfil their part of the agreement.

7.2 NGOs shall utilize the opportunities available to them through their normal work to disseminate information on WHO policies and programmes.

7.3 NGOs shall collaborate individually or collectively with WHO programmes to further health-for-all goals.

7.4 NGOs shall individually or collectively collaborate with the Member States where their activities are based in the implementation of the national/regional health-for-all strategies.

Annex 2

ISSUES AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

A. Issues Related to Working Relations

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Possible response</u>
1. What mechanisms would (a) Member States of the Region, and (b) regional offices consider are needed at the regional level to ensure structured <u>working relations</u> with NGOs?	<p>Section 5, sub-section 5.2 of the revised Working Principles (Annex 1) permits a working arrangement to be made with regional or national NGOs by establishing a structured work plan of collaborative activities to be carried out over a specific period, agreed upon by WHO and the NGO concerned, and in consultation with the Member States. Such an <u>ad hoc</u> arrangement would remain in force only as long as there was a need for collaboration. This working arrangement, referred to as "working relations", would normally be established by the Regional Director concerned, in consultation with the Director-General, as indicated in Section 5 of the revised Working Principles.</p> <p>The process and mechanism to establish a working relationship and to develop and implement a programme of activity under such a working relationship will be in the line with sub-sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the Working Principles. However, the application for establishing such a working relationship with WHO from a national or regional NGO should be submitted to the Regional Director concerned for processing, indicating the activities which might form the basis for establishing the working relationship. This arrangement for consultation and cooperation with NGOs at the regional level should be considered as informal, as is the case at the global level.</p>

The Regional Committee may consider this and agree or provide alternative views, if any.

2. What mechanism would be required for periodic reporting by the Regional Director to the Regional Committee, and by the latter to the Executive Board, with regard to the establishment of such working relations?

The Regional Director would periodically report to the Regional Committee with regard to the establishment of working relationship with regional and national NGOs. The Regional Committee's views can then be communicated by the Regional Director to the Director-General for placing before the Executive Board. Alternatively, the Regional Committee may decide to designate a member of the Executive Board from the concerned Region to report to the Executive Board on behalf of the Regional Committee.

3. In the light of the Regional Committee discussions, amendments to Section 5 of the Working Principles may be required, and suggestions for such changes from the Regional Committee should be communicated to headquarters. For example, it may not be necessary to distinguish between "working relations" (sub-section 5.2) and "informal working relations" (sub-section 5.3) since working relations are, by definition, always of an informal nature.

In view of the fact that all steps for the development and implementation of working relationship are considered as "informal" by definition, it is indeed not necessary to distinguish between working relations and informal working relations as mentioned respectively in sub-sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the Working Principles. Hence the amendment as suggested is necessary, especially to avoid confusion owing to too many terminologies.

B. Issues Related to Formal Relations as Defined in Sub-Section 2.1 of the Working Principles

1. Do Member States of the Region consider that some type of formal (de jure) relationship, similar to "official relations" at the headquarters level, would be required for regional/national NGOs, in addition to the provision for working relations? (Such a formal relationship would entail the creation by the Regional Office of a special list of regional/national NGOs which would have a de jure

As a first step, at the regional level, the establishment of working relations with NGOs (national and regional) should be developed by the Regional Office for a trial period of, say, two or three years with a few selected NGOs where closer collaboration by means of a work plan with a specified time-frame would contribute to more efficient operations. This trial experience might then be

relationship with that Office. This would also provide a framework for formal "recognition" of NGOs, and give them certain privileges and responsibilities.)

reviewed by the Regional Director and reported to the Regional Committee in order to assess (a) whether "working relations" provided an adequate mechanism for collaboration between the Regional Office and regional/national NGOs, or (b) whether it would be useful to proceed to the second step of establishing guiding principles and a mechanism for granting "formal relations" to regional and/or national NGOs.

If, however, the Regional Committee feels that "formal relations" as defined in Section 2 of the revised Working Principles should also be established from the very beginning, the response to the following issues would have to be considered:

2. What mechanisms would the Regional Committee consider necessary to ensure consultation by the Regional Director with the Member State concerned and with the Director-General prior to the consideration of an application for formal relations? Same as in the case of working relationship.
3. Would the responsibility for granting such formal relations and periodic review of such relations rest with the Regional Committee? Yes
4. What mechanism would be required to ensure periodic reporting from the Regional Committee to the Executive Board in the case of NGOs applying for, or already having, formal relations with the Regional Office? Same as in the case of working relationship.
5. If it is considered useful to make a provision for a formal de jure type of relationship, the Regional Committee may wish to consider whether the text of the revised Working Principles, suitably adapted to reflect the possibility of such a formal relationship, might serve as adequate guidelines for such formal relations at the regional level. Yes. However, this should be cleared by the Member States/Regional Committee before adoption.