



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-FOURTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY
Provisional agenda item 13.4

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Strengthening health services delivery

Strengthening health systems in developing countries

Report by the Secretariat

BACKGROUND

1. The Fifty-second World Health Assembly in May 1999 requested the Director-General to report on progress in implementing resolution WHA52.23, on *Strengthening health systems in developing countries*.
2. The resolution *inter alia* urged Member States to reaffirm the importance of health as an indispensable resource for sustainable development and to adopt, as a matter of priority, measures that would serve the needs of the most vulnerable of their populations. It called upon developed countries, the international community and multilateral agencies to continue to provide to developing countries the support they need to strengthen their health systems. The Director-General was specifically requested to cooperate with Member States in achieving access to safe and affordable medicines and other health technologies; to strengthen the capacity of the health sector to address the root causes of ill-health; and to collate data which would help to ensure that future policies for health sector reform were based on the best evidence.
3. These issues have been a major focus of WHO's work over the past two years. Progress is summarized below.
4. **Health and development.** Over the last two years, efforts to draw increasing international attention to health issues have had a dramatic impact. Heads of State from all nations have made it clear that their people cannot participate fully in social and economic development if they are ill. Health features prominently in the Millennium Declaration adopted by Heads of State at the United Nations Millennium Summit (New York, 6-8 September 2000). This has helped to place health in a central place on the international development agenda. Health is also firmly on the agenda of different high-level political groupings, such as OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement, ASEAN, the European Union and the G8. Good health is referred to as fundamental to human development. It is seen as a key to prosperity.
5. A growing body of evidence at a macro- as well as a micro-level links improvements in health to reduction in poverty. The most recent evidence is being brought together by the WHO Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, whose report will be published at the end of 2001. A broader approach to health within the context of human development, humanitarian action, equity between men and women, and human rights, with a particular focus on the links between health and poverty

reduction, is part of the new emphases set out in WHO's corporate strategy¹ and in the policy framework underlying the Proposed programme budget 2002-2003.

6. **Addressing the major health challenges.** In the last year, Heads of State and ministers of health have drawn particular attention to the devastating human and economic impact of communicable diseases – particularly HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Political leaders in developing countries and development agencies have urged WHO to work on ways in which different actors – led by the governments of developing countries – can work effectively together to step up the scale of the world's response.

7. Concerted work is now being taken to build on, shape and scale up existing activities undertaken by governments, nongovernmental organizations and private groups. The effort needs to be intensive, and to last for at least 10 years. It is focusing initially on infectious diseases (starting with HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis), and is likely to extend to child, adolescent and maternal health, nutritional disorders and noncommunicable diseases (including those caused by tobacco consumption). Such action would best be undertaken within a framework that is likely to include the following elements:

- collection of additional financial resources for international health, through funds dedicated to health action; such resources would be additional to existing bilateral and multilateral development assistance;
- slim-line, efficient mechanisms to move funds to where they are needed, reward good performance, and account for all spending;
- global efforts, usually combining public and private activity, to reduce prices of drugs and other vital commodities, to move them to where they are needed, and to help encourage essential innovation through research and development;
- the building-up of health systems, institutions and infrastructure, using public, voluntary and private service providers, in order to get vital health services to those who need them;
- measurement processes and information systems that track what happens to the investments made, reveal results, and relate achievements to the resources invested;
- campaigns to mobilize support from politicians, the media, entrepreneurs and the public within poor countries.

8. The work under way systematically emphasizes generation of greatly increased resources for health. Evidence being accumulated by the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health highlights the magnitude of resources needed for the international response to the health crisis to be commensurate with the scale of the problem. Some of these monies will have to come from national budgets – supplemented by inflows from debt relief. The lion's share, however, will need to come from increases in development assistance.

9. **Improving poor peoples' access to essential medicines at low cost.** Increasing attention worldwide has been given to improving access of poor people to care, particularly medicines. A full report on WHO's revised drug strategy, including action on essential drugs and medicines, has been

¹ Document EB105/3.

provided to the Health Assembly.¹ Over the last 12 months, an important focus has been on the drugs for treating people living with HIV/AIDS. Negotiations with producers and growing competition between producers have led to substantial reductions in prices. Even with these reductions, however, their cost is such that considerable external financing will be needed if the medicines are to be affordable in low-income countries.

10. *Improving the operation of health systems.* Substantial work is under way to evaluate and analyse the performance of health systems in poor countries and to reinvigorate efforts to ensure that people have access to the care they need. Emphasis is laid on stewardship on the part of governments, supported by a serious effort to strengthen the capabilities of human resources through development of leadership and public health skills, and to retain critically needed staff. This approach would be backed by investment focused on essential infrastructure, together with logistic support for distributing medicines and other vital commodities.

11. To this end, efforts are needed to ensure that health systems are able to deliver effective, responsive, and fairly financed services. Such services would pay particular attention to proper access to, and coverage of, their essential components, quality of the care provided – whether preventive, diagnostic, curative or supportive, acceptability to users, and efficient use of resources in their delivery.

ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

12. The Assembly is invited to take note of this report.

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¹ Document A54/17.