

Strengthening health systems in developing countries

The Fifty-fourth World Health Assembly,

Mindful of the principles of, and obvious need for, technical cooperation among developing countries and of the interest shown by the World Health Assembly by virtue of its resolutions WHA31.41, WHA31.54, WHA32.27, WHA35.24, WHA36.34, WHA37.15, WHA37.16, WHA38.23, WHA39.23, WHA40.17, WHA40.30, WHA50.27, WHA51.16 and WHA52.23 in strengthening this type of cooperation with a view to improving the health situation in developing countries;

Underlining the principles and purposes of the United Nations as set out in the United Nations Charter, including the sovereign equality of States and the development of friendly relations among nations based on the respect for equal rights and the self-determination of peoples, which have been consistently reaffirmed by Members of the Non-Aligned Movement;

Recognizing that in order to realize aspirations and achieve the social development and well-being of people, it is a central responsibility of governments and all sectors of society to establish measures which would facilitate the attainment of goals relating to the eradication of poverty, and to food security, health, education, employment, housing and social integration;

Reaffirming the commitments made in this regard during the twenty-fourth special session of the United Nations General Assembly entitled “World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world”;

Recognizing that the main determinants of ill health such as poverty and lack of education are also among the critical causes of underdevelopment, and that health is both a necessary precondition to, and an outcome of, the overall development process;

Further recognizing that the health needs of women, girls, children and older persons shall be given particular attention;

Mindful of the fact that globalization presents opportunities and challenges for all countries and that developing countries, especially the poorest, are vulnerable to those adverse effects of globalization that lead to greater inequities in health and health care both within such countries and between developed and developing countries;

Recalling that the lack of access to safe and affordable essential medicines and other health technologies is a significant factor in perpetuating and extending such inequities;

Noting with concern the need for funds for development cooperation in the face of growing demands within developing countries, and recognizing that debt-relief including HIPC and other efforts could potentially free up considerable resources for use in the development of health infrastructure and services;

Recognizing the progress that has been achieved in the areas of human genetics and biotechnology, and the potential rewards that could accrue from research in this area;

Noting with concern the increase in HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa;

Welcoming the prominence accorded to HIV/AIDS on the international agenda, and noting the adoption of a resolution on the access to care by the 57th Session of the Commission on Human Rights, the decision by the Abuja Summit on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and related diseases, the special discussion of the TRIPS Council of the WTO on the TRIPS Agreement and access to essential medicines to be held at the request of the Africa Group in June 2001 and the forthcoming United Nations General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS;

Endorsing the recognition of mental health as a significant challenge requiring special attention within the health systems of developing countries;

Appreciating WHO's initiatives with regard to the promotion of horizontal cooperation among developing countries,

1. REAFFIRMS its commitment to the objectives of the health-for-all strategy, in particular the achievement of equitable, affordable, accessible and sustainable health systems based on primary health care in all Member States;
2. RECOGNIZES the sovereign right of each country to adopt national policies appropriate to the specific needs of its people;
3. URGES Member States:
 - (1) to reaffirm the importance of health as an indispensable resource for sustainable development and to advance such development through actions which promote and maintain equity and equality, including between men and women;
 - (2) to continue to develop health systems in accordance with the principles listed above, and to ensure that where markets exist within the health sector, they function efficiently within a suitable framework of ethical principles and in accordance with the technical regulations and standards established by the governmental authority;
 - (3) to participate in the special discussion of the WTO TRIPS Council on intellectual property issues relevant to the access to essential medicines, with a view to addressing the concerns expressed by developing countries;
 - (4) to adopt, as a matter of priority, measures that will serve the needs of the most vulnerable of their populations;

- (5) to make every effort to ensure that countries are not hindered in their efforts to utilize the options available to them under international agreements, acceded to in order to protect and advance the access to life-saving and essential medicines;
 - (6) to continue to support research in the area of human genetics and biotechnology subject to accepted scientific and ethical standards and to the potential benefit of all, especially the poor;
 - (7) to refrain from all measures, that are contrary to international law, including international conventions, and which hinder health service delivery and deny care to those in greatest need;
4. CALLS upon Member States, especially developed countries:
- (1) to continue to facilitate the transfer of materials, equipment, technology and resources appropriate to the health needs of developing countries;
 - (2) to support technical cooperation with and among developing countries;
 - (3) to review, with a view to increasing, their allocation of resources intended for development cooperation and the fight against HIV/AIDS and other priority diseases;
5. REQUESTS the international community and multilateral institutions:
- (1) to maintain a people-centred focus in their deliberations, particularly where measures proposed in such deliberations could directly or indirectly impact negatively on the health status of the most vulnerable;
 - (2) where appropriate, to integrate the health dimension into their programmes and strategies, particularly in respect of HIV/AIDS and other priority diseases;
 - (3) according to their mandate and particular expertise, to provide support for efforts aimed at strengthening the health systems of developing countries;
 - (4) to identify and implement development-oriented and durable solutions to the debt servicing problems of developing countries so as to alleviate external debt;
 - (5) to implement the conclusions of the United Nations summits and conferences that address health problems and to make further recommendations in this regard;
 - (6) to support the establishment of a global HIV/AIDS and health fund;
6. REQUESTS the Director-General:
- (1) to continue to support Member States in their efforts to meet the health needs of their people, especially those who are most vulnerable;
 - (2) to cooperate with Member States in achieving access to safe and affordable essential medicines and other appropriate health technologies;

- (3) to strengthen the capacity of the health sector to participate effectively in multisectoral efforts which seek to address the root causes of ill health;
- (4) to continue to provide support for the work being undertaken by institutions in developing countries in the area of health sector reform, and to validate and collate the work of these and other institutions, in order to ensure that future policies and advice are founded on the best available evidence;
- (5) to expand on the opportunities for interaction with Members of the Non-Aligned Movement and other developing countries, aimed at facilitating and enhancing the work of WHO;
- (6) to report to the Fifty-sixth World Health Assembly on the steps taken and progress made in implementing this resolution.

Ninth plenary meeting, 21 May 2001
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