

# Section 1 : Social and Economic Dimensions

## Chapter 6 : Protection and Promotion of Human Health

The goals of sustainable development and care for the environment cannot be reached without addressing people's primary health needs.

### A. Meeting primary health care needs, particularly in rural areas

The health sector cannot meet basic needs and objectives on its own; it is dependent on cooperative efforts in education, housing and public works. People's health depends on their physical, spiritual, biological and economic/social environment.

Development which affects the environment can cause or magnify health problems. On the other hand, lack of development may also cause or worsen health problems.

#### Objectives

- to meet the basic health needs of people, particularly those in greatest need.
- to coordinate the involvement of citizens, the health sector and relevant non-health sectors (business, social, educational and religious institutions) in solutions to health problems.

#### Activities

Governments and local communities should:

- develop and strengthen primary health care systems that are practical, community based, scientifically sound, socially acceptable and appropriate to needs
- improve coordination between health and relevant sectors at all levels of government, in communities and organisations
- provide social services support
- monitor the effectiveness of health programmes
- promote health education in schools, information exchange, technical support and training
- support initiatives for self-management of services by vulnerable groups
- integrate traditional knowledge and experience into national health systems, as appropriate
- provide outreach activities, especially for rural areas
- promote and strengthen community based rehabilitation services for people with disabilities
- conduct environmental health research, including research on behaviour and ways of increasing use of services by vulnerable populations.

## **B. Control of communicable diseases**

Vaccines and medicines have brought many communicable diseases under control. However, there remain many important communicable diseases for which environmental control measures are indispensable, especially in the field of water supply and sanitation.

The socio-economic impact of the HIV pandemic is expected to be devastating for all countries and increasingly for women and children. While direct health costs will be substantial, they will be dwarfed by indirect costs associated with the loss of income and decreased productivity of the workforce.

### **Objectives**

Agenda 21 lists objectives for eradication or control of various diseases. Those objectives relevant to New Zealand include:

- to mobilize and unify national and international efforts against AIDS to prevent infection and to reduce the personal and social impact of HIV infection
- to contain the resurgence of tuberculosis, with particular emphasis on multiple antibiotic resistant forms
- to accelerate research on improved vaccines and implement to the fullest extent possible the use of vaccines in the prevention of disease.

### **Activities**

Each national government should produce a health plan. Components relevant to local government include:

- identifying environmental hazards that cause communicable diseases
- public information and health education on the risks of communicable diseases and on environmental methods for their control
- involve health professionals in planning, housing and agriculture
- control of environmental factors including water supply and sanitation, water pollution, food quality, disease carrying organisms and environmentally sound garbage collection .

## **C. Protecting vulnerable groups**

In addition to meeting basic health needs, specific emphasis has to be given to vulnerable groups, particularly children, youth, women, indigenous people, the elderly, people with disabilities and the very poor. Many children die worldwide from preventable causes. The health of children is severely affected by poor nutrition and adverse environmental factors. Youth are vulnerable to the problems associated with urbanization and social changes. Problems include substance abuse, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Particular attention should be given to pre-natal care to ensure healthy babies. Indigenous people tend to feature disproportionately in unemployment, lack of housing, poverty and poor health.

### **Activities**

Governments and local communities should initiate or enhance programmes to:

- strengthen basic health care services for children including prenatal care, breastfeeding, immunisation and nutrition programmes
- promote a legal framework protecting children from sexual and workplace exploitation
- strengthen services for youth in health, education and social sectors to provide better information, education, counselling and treatment for specific health problems
- involve women's groups in decision-making at the national and community levels to identify health risks and incorporate health issues in national action programmes on women and development
- strengthen, through resources and self-management, preventive and curative health services for indigenous people and their communities
- integrate traditional knowledge and experience into health systems
- support health education and increase the use of mass media to deliver information to target groups.

#### **D. Meeting the urban health challenge**

Urban development is often associated with destructive effects on the physical environment and the resource base needed for sustainable development. In urban environments, many factors that affect human health are outside the health sector. For instance, poor urban living conditions including environmental pollution lead to poor health. Overcrowding and inadequate housing contribute to respiratory diseases, tuberculosis, meningitis and other diseases.

#### **Objectives**

The global objective is to achieve a 10 to 40 percent improvement in indicators measuring health, health services, environment and housing.

#### **Activities**

Local authorities, with support from central government and international organisations:

- develop local health plans
- network with scientific, religious, medical, business, social and other city institutions
- use "enabling strategies" that emphasise "doing with" rather than "doing for" and create supportive environments for health
- promote public health education in schools, work places, mass media etc.
- encourage communities to develop personal skills and awareness of primary health care
- promote community-based rehabilitation activities for people with disabilities
- survey the existing health, social and environmental conditions in cities

- strengthen environmental health services
- adopt health impact and environmental impact assessment procedures
- provide training and information for new and existing personnel.

## **E. Reducing health risks from environmental pollution and hazards**

In many parts of the world, the general environment (air, water, land), work places and even individual dwellings are so badly polluted that the health of the people is affected. Pollution control and health protection measures have often not kept pace with economic development.

### **Objectives**

The overall objective is to minimise hazards and to maintain the environment so that human health and safety are not at risk while still encouraging development to proceed.

### **Activities**

National policies and programmes should be developed for:

- urban air pollution
- water pollution
- pesticides
- solid waste
- human settlements
- noise
- ionizing and non-ionizing radiation
- ozone depletion
- environmental health impact assessment
- pollution control and management
- industrial hygiene
- monitoring and assessment of environmental quality and the health status of populations
- injury monitoring and reduction:
  - develop strategies in all sectors (industry, traffic and others) consistent with the WHO safe cities and safe communities programmes to reduce the frequency and severity of injury
- research promotion and methodology development.