

Issues paper

Day 5: Friday, 7 November 2003

Theme: Partnering for better health

During the discussion of this theme, participants are invited to address the following topic:

Working in countries: achieving results through cooperation

Background information

If health outcomes are to be improved dramatically, taking advantage of the prominent position health is currently enjoying on the international health agenda, then strong partnerships are essential. Special efforts are required to bring partnerships into being and to maintain them for good results. While it is the case that no two partnerships are identical, there are nevertheless certain elements that are common to all.

At country level, the health sector often lacks mechanisms for enhancing coordination between governments, development agencies, nongovernmental organizations and private entities. Opportunities can be missed because efforts are not combined and scarce resources not shared. Moreover, too many initiatives are imposed "top down" and are thus poorly adapted to local needs. Improving coordination and collaboration has helped to reduce duplication and has increased the efficiency and effectiveness of national and donor-funded programmes.

In recent years, in order to coordinate and improve health development, governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations and other key development partners have launched a number of partnership mechanisms at the country level. Such mechanisms include, for example, poverty reduction strategies and sector-wide development programmes. Mechanisms specific to the United Nations (for example, the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework) together with country coordination mechanisms related to global initiatives (the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) have helped to harmonize policies and programmes. Often, the complexity of health and health-related problems at the country level has demanded enhanced technical collaboration between two or more agencies in order to make effective use of each other's comparative advantage.

WHO's partnerships at country level involve the relevant governments (mainly ministries of health), together with bilateral and multilateral organizations, organizations of the United Nations system, international financial institutions, the International Committee of the Red Cross, nongovernmental organizations, civil society and volunteer organizations. WHO is pursuing these partnerships for the full range of technical cooperation relating to the health sector. Indeed, WHO corporate strategy recognizes that new ways of working are needed if WHO is to respond effectively to the changing international environment. Negotiating national and international partnerships is, therefore, one of WHO's core functions. As an illustration of its current involvement in partnership and coordination mechanisms, WHO has joined the United Nations Development Group, a United Nations coordinating mechanism, in order to pursue the reform agenda further, and WHO is also part of the United Nations resident coordinator system at the country level.

Case studies from Bangladesh, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Philippines and Zambia will provide further evidence of the positive experiences WHO has enjoyed in each of the three categories of partnership mechanisms mentioned above.

Points for discussion

- The lessons learned from partnership initiatives.
- The impact of partnerships at country level and the challenges faced.
- Ongoing work to strengthen WHO offices at country level.

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