

MOVING AHEAD

Even in the poorest countries and settings, there is much scientific knowledge about critical environmental hazards and their impact on health. The social, environmental and economic costs are increasingly well-documented. The key challenge is to **harness** this knowledge to policy definition and action in situations where many other issues compete for attention.

Significant progress has been made in countries of some regions, particularly the Americas and Europe. Regional processes of dialogue between ministers of health and environment have been launched or are well-established, and collaboration between initiatives such as HELI and those processes could yield many fruitful synergies. But in most countries around the world there is much more to be done to ensure the mainstreaming of environment and health considerations into all government sectors and economic endeavours.

"The data, knowledge, skills, and capacity needed for making and implementing decisions are important, but they are not all that difficult to mobilize. The key barrier is governmental."

*Senior Director, International Policy Initiatives,
Center for Conservation and Government, Conservation International (2).*

The first phase of the WHO/UNEP HELI initiative has generated significant interest in developing countries, as well as the international and bilateral agencies that support development. The main focus of a second phase of the HELI initiative will be to sustain, refine and expand the approach with existing and potential developing country partners. This means support for the implementation of recommendations emerging from the first round of projects and the initiation of pilot projects in other countries. These new projects should take place in diverse regions of the world and support intersectoral assessment and action, particularly at national and local levels, on a range of traditional and emerging environment and health issues (e.g. urban transport and sustainability; ecosystem changes and emerging diseases; indoor air pollution; water quality and sewage contamination). Evaluation and feedback on the results obtained in the first round of pilot projects should facilitate creative cross-fertilization of knowledge, south-south learning opportunities and the application of successful approaches elsewhere.



A child and a tree



Air and earth

The second phase also will include investment in the further refinement of decision-support methods and better use of environment and health decision-making tools, such as economic valuation and impact assessment, particularly for use in poorly resourced settings. Finally, advocacy and communication strategies should capitalize on the initial investment in developing HELI, and ensure that the approach and its products are applied, debated and refined.

Shrewd entrepreneurship in the private sector capitalizes on the investment in new products and approaches with systematic marketing and distribution alongside continuous learning and fine-tuning. Similarly, sustained investment by international institutions, developing country governments and donors sends an important message to policy-makers internationally and at country level:

It is only by addressing health and environment issues together that the real value of each can be fully appreciated.

UNEP