Environment and development-related health effects are becoming of increasing concern world-wide, in both developing and developed countries. As problems become more complex and widespread, resources with which to tackle them are dwindling. New approaches needed to address the challenges must be based on integrated, holistic policy and planning mechanisms at all tiers of government, involving all relevant partners and sectors. In this connection, there is a clear need to improve information for policy- and decision-making, in order that it support the new ways of thinking and approaches to addressing cross-cutting problems.

This document has attempted to lay the basis for the development and use of health and environmental indicators in sustainable development planning. It is emphasized that indicators are most effective if they are developed as part of the overall policy and planning process, whether this occurs at the national or the local level. More work is needed to evaluate the use and effectiveness of indicators in this regard.

On a global scale, indicators have a role to play in facilitating comparisons of health and environmental conditions and trends world-wide, and also in providing information on the development of policies to address global problems. It is recognized however, that it is difficult to develop for this purpose ‘core’ indicators which are both universally applicable and universally measurable. Nevertheless, this book has provided a basis from which core sets of indicators might be developed for various purposes, as well as an organizational framework for the development of indicators.

In order to manage health, environment and development hazards more effectively in the future, decision-makers in various fields should develop and use appropriate indicators, so that the information provided is as useful and meaningful as possible for policy and planning at all levels. The public must also become more closely involved in indicator development and use.

Shortcomings of data bases and information systems remain a major problem worldwide, including data collection and systems of analysis, and information dissemination. Some indicators demand special monitoring systems and have significant resource implications. It is therefore essential that they are developed in as efficient and effective a way as possible, the ultimate aim being improved decision-making. In this regard there remains a key need to harmonize indicator development systems at all levels and tiers of government, on both a national, as well as international level.
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