

WORLD HEALTH
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DE LA SANTÉ

EXECUTIVE BOARD

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FURTHER ACTION ON GENERAL WORLD HEALTH PROBLEMS

1. The first four years of work by WHO have shown its programmes developing in practice into two almost distinctive groups. Firstly there are the essential programmes of general international character, many of them traditional since they go back to the inception of international health. Such are the epidemiological, quarantine, statistical and standardization of drugs and biological services, etc. Secondly, there are the advisory services provided directly to individual governments requesting assistance for one or more particular problems, e.g. tuberculosis, child health, etc.
2. Inevitably the form of the advisory services in the first phase has been determined almost entirely by local needs and by the separate requests of individual countries. Originally the Interim Commission and the Health Assembly had conceived that such advisory services provided by WHO on request to governments would be classified in categories or priorities based on world criteria. Thus it was visualized that the Health Assembly would define true world programmes into which the country requests would be incorporated. However, the variety of country requests, the differences in local and regional needs, and the summation of many other factors, not least of which was the system of regionalization, have led to the idea of world programme priorities largely falling into abeyance.
3. It seems therefore now appropriate to review the position of these advisory services and determine whether a stage has been reached to allow of a fuller integration and direction of local national proposals into wider regional or even world programmes. It is accepted that differing local needs and circumstances will still mean many programmes (projects) being outside any general regional or world pattern. These will necessarily continue to be a substantial part of WHO assistance to countries. However, over and above such programmes, it is appropriate to ask whether there are not justifiable arguments for now giving more emphasis to selected regional and/or world programmes.

4. Some of the facts suggesting the desirability of WHO considering such a development are:-

(i) The constitutional statement that "Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of disease, especially communicable disease, is a common danger" (from the Preamble of the WHO Constitution).

(ii) The constitutional functions laid on WHO in Chapter II, Article 2, e.g.

(a) "to act as the directing and co-ordinating authority on international health work",

(g) "to stimulate and advance work to eradicate epidemic, endemic and other diseases".

(iii) The concept of the priorities for WHO programmes based on the principle of important world health problems amenable to international action which had been adopted by the First and Second World Health Assemblies.

(iv) The General Programme of Work for a Specific Period adopted by the Fourth and Fifth World Health Assemblies has specifically included, inter alia, the desirability of programmes being selected with a promise of yielding demonstrable results. It has further emphasized the selection of fields of action which are likely to benefit either directly or indirectly the largest possible number of Member States and people.¹

(v) The Fourth World Health Assembly, - to refer to a more defined aspect of the need for a general co-ordinated programme - called for action by all governments to remove insanitary conditions conducive to the existence of such diseases (i.e. quarantinable diseases) especially in and around ports and airports. In the resolution in question (WHA4.80) special attention is directed to the need for governments, inter alia, to eliminate sources and vectors of disease, and to raise the level of protection by vaccination and otherwise against plague, cholera, yellow fever, smallpox and typhus.

¹ Off. Rec. World Hlth. Org. 32, Annex 10

(vi) The VI Meeting of the Directing Council of the Pan American Sanitary Organization and the IV Meeting of the Regional Committee for the Americas passed the following resolution:¹

"RESOLUTION XXIII: PROGRAMME AGAINST SMALLPOX IN THE AMERICAS

Whereas the sum of \$75,000 from the Working Capital Fund has been assigned to the initiation of a Supplementary Programme against Smallpox in the Americas in 1953; and

It is essential, for the success of this Supplementary Programme, to assure its continuity in the years following 1953,

The Directing Council

RESOLVES to authorize the Executive Committee to include the Supplementary Programme against Smallpox in the Inter-Country Programmes of the Proposed Programme and Budget of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau for 1954, and to assign an amount sufficient to assure its continuity."

(vii) The Regional Committee of the Western Pacific at its third session, September 1952, included smallpox as a definite feature of its proposed 1954 Programme in that it is a matter of serious concern to all member countries in the Region.

5. It therefore seems obvious that satisfactory though the system of individual direct country programmes is, something additional is demanded of WHO. A system of integrated country programmes which together form a world programme and which contribute to world needs as well as assisting individual countries is undoubtedly expected. Further, in spite of the undoubted contribution that individual country projects make to the common good, there is a legitimate desire that WHO programmes should at least in part help all countries directly. There is a need, perhaps not yet met in the field of advisory services to governments, for WHO to demonstrate its essential place in the interests of all countries through general international and/or regional programmes. Thus will both developed and under-developed countries realize alike their dependence upon and interest in WHO activities.

¹ Document EB11/13

In this respect it is certain there is some justifiable concern that such a matter of world-wide concern as the existence of foci of communicable disease threatening all countries has not yet produced sufficiently vigorous concerted action. This criticism could be offered in spite of the great advances made in such specific fields as the promulgation of International Sanitary Regulations (WHO Regulations No.2). Indeed these Regulations cannot be fully effective in the interests of international health, travel, trade and relationships until the governments of the world by concerted action deal with insanitary conditions maintaining foci of diseases or areas susceptible to infection.

6. If the above general summary and argument are supported the Executive Board may agree that it is desirable to make at least a commencement of or indeed a return to general and/or world-wide campaigns over and above the existing WHO programmes.

Such a campaign would require, inter alia:

(a) selection of an appropriate subject or subjects of general concern for action. It may be generally acceptable that one such subject, and probably the most appropriate with which to begin, is to be found in smallpox - a matter of direct interest to the majority of governments and communities, and an international problem with many serious aspects.

Further, smallpox has been specifically indicated not only in the resolutions of the Health Assembly, Executive Board, and Regional Committees mentioned above, but has featured prominently in other proposals by these bodies. The Third World Health Assembly, for example, gave expression to the view that greater weight should be given to smallpox in programmes (Resolution WHA3.18).

Additional facts which support the selection of smallpox as a suitable subject for action are:-

- (i) People of all races and ages may contract the disease; this makes it a potential problem for all health administrations.
- (ii) It can be prevented by simple and effective methods.
- (iii) It is an international problem in the sense that in many countries outbreaks result from importation. International action is therefore

necessary for its solution.

- (iv) Action against it would make more effective the new WHO Sanitary Regulations No.2, a matter of general concern to all governments.
- (b) a general or world-wide programme whereby all or the majority of governments participate in and benefit from a WHO plan through such activities as:-
 - (i) technical advice (consultants)
 - (ii) demonstrations (e.g. vaccination techniques)
 - (iii) production of essential medical supplies (e.g. appropriate vaccines)
 - (iv) assistance in the investigation of relevant problems of method of spread, mode of control, etc.
 - (v) assistance to countries in raising the level of resistance and immunity by vaccination and otherwise

7. The adoption by the Executive Board of such a proposal would be in harmony with its responsibility and authority "to submit advice or proposals to the Health Assembly on its own initiative". (Article 28e). It would then be necessary to present the proposal to the Sixth World Health Assembly for approval of the programme, together with estimates to be prepared by the Director-General of the cost of such a programme, and proposed method or methods for financing it. The cost to WHO would be relatively small as the action to be taken by WHO would be mainly of a co-ordinating and stimulating character combined with the supply of vaccine to some health administrations.

8. The Director-General places the matter before the Executive Board because he considers that:-

- (a) One of the constitutional and original basic policies of the Organization, viz. general programmes and priorities, is now revealed as requiring recognition and action.
- (b) There is a need, politically, technically, and administratively, as soon as possible in the system of advisory services to governments, to establish one or

more programmes of appeal to all and every government as part of a world wide campaign.

(c) There is a need to demonstrate through such a direct practical general world programme the importance WHO has for every Member State and the world as a whole.

(d) WHO has reached the stage to give more emphasis to her role, in co-operation with all governments, of tackling world health and medical problems not only through the necessary and valuable present form of direct assistance to governments, but by concerted international action.

(e) Other fundamental services provided by WHO to all countries of the world, especially those in the epidemiological and international sanitary field with their added importance to world trade and economy, are dependent for their full effect upon the collateral action here proposed as a beginning.