
Director's Letter



FOUR PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

The startling events, transformations, and reforms that we have witnessed in recent years have electrified the world. For the countries of our Region, especially those in Latin America, where problems deriving from the crisis period of the 1980s persist, this dynamic situation creates great challenges and opportunities. It also demands that we reexamine the health implications of four lines of action that are fundamental for the future.

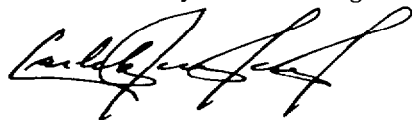
The first concerns the insertion of the Latin American economies into the rapidly changing world market, which requires broadening the perception of our countries as national entities into a cohesive vision of hemispheric unity. Economic openness and competitiveness, cooperation, linkages between governments, and the presentation of a united front are now essential for survival and for development.

Experience has shown, however, that economic growth in and of itself does not guarantee improvements in the general welfare. On the contrary, it can exacerbate the differences that generate social problems. For this reason, a new paradigm of development is needed. We cannot keep applying the decrepit models that have failed us in the past, whose sad legacy shapes the hard reality facing our peoples and accumulates as a social debt of obscene proportions. Conditions must be created that permit production and productivity to recuperate, but in ways that satisfy long-ignored needs. At the same time, conditions that will guarantee a lasting development must be assured.

To tackle this great challenge, the roles of the various actors in the social arena must be rethought, especially that of the State in relation to society. The political will to achieve a development that leads to higher levels of equity and responds to the essential needs of the people demands an active, just, efficient, and incorruptible State, capable of maintaining the dynamic political and social stability that favors long-term development.

Finally, the satisfaction of specific health needs requires profound and continuous evolution in both the concept and practice of what constitutes appropriate health action. Striving for universal access to services has to be reconciled with improving quality and efficacy. All aspects of health must be considered—ethical, economic, and political—in order to appreciate how inextricably intertwined these four lines of action are.

In setting forth these ideas, it is our hope to stimulate reflection and dialogue on health in the process of development. A healthy population is necessary to fulfill both the requisites and ends of development, and the priority afforded to health will be reflected in the countries' achievements, both individually and as a Region.



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