

*executive committee of
the directing council*



PAN AMERICAN
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

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WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



111th Meeting
Washington, D.C.
June-July 1993

Provisional Agenda Item 4.3

CE111/10 (Eng.)
19 May 1993
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

**PROPOSAL FOR A PAN AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT,
AND DEVELOPMENT**

The XXXVI Meeting of the Directing Council of the Health Pan American Organization, held in September 1992, examined the "Report on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and its Implications for the Work of the Pan American Health Organization" presented by the Secretariat, and adopted Resolution XIII, in which the Member Governments are urged to strengthen the technical, administrative, and managerial capacity of national and local institutions responsible for the management of environmental health. This capacity-building is expressed primarily in terms of: a) preparation of sectoral analyses; b) formulation of comprehensive sectoral policies; and c) development of plans and coordination of their execution. In addition, the resolution requests the countries to facilitate the establishment or strengthening of a high-level commission to coordinate activities aimed at ensuring implementation of health and environmental actions.

Furthermore, the above-mentioned resolution requests the Director of PAHO to support the countries in the formulation of policies, regulations, and plans regarding health, environmental, and development issues, with a view to bringing about action for the protection and promotion of health, and, among other related requests, to study the desirability and feasibility of convening a Pan American Conference on Health, Environment, and Development, to be attended by participants from the highest levels of the health, public works, and environment sectors of the Region, for the analysis of common problems, frameworks, and forms of action, and to make a recommendation to the 111th Meeting of the Executive Committee in June 1993.

The present document considers the principal factors that may be relevant with regard to the desirability and feasibility of holding such a conference, and concludes that it is both timely and necessary to hold it in the second quarter of 1994 at the latest, as a contribution and complement to other national and international efforts to comply with the different chapters of Agenda 21 of UNCED. It is anticipated that the process of preparing and holding the conference will open up opportunities that are necessary in order to make a start on integrating the health sector with the other sectors that are already acting on the commitments of UNCED and, accordingly, have access to facilities and resources that are available for this purpose. In addition, it is hoped that a Pan American Charter on Health, Environment, and Development can be prepared, which will set forth a body of principles, policies, objectives, and targets stemming from a national and regional consensus among all the entities that have an influence on, or responsibility for, environmental health. A proposal is included to hold the conference during the month of June 1994.

1. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

1.1 Health and Environment in the Region of the Americas

Environmental health programs have occupied a prominent place in the activities of PAHO/WHO virtually from the time the Organization was created, and they have evolved with the changing situation of the countries and in response to the mandates of the Governing Bodies, which have provided direction and resources for program execution.

In 1990, the Governing Bodies approved nine strategic orientations for the Organization--including "health in development," which stands at the confluence of the other eight--thus giving priority to efforts to guarantee greater equity in the standard of living and health of the peoples of the Hemisphere and in their access to basic health services, which are essential for sustainable development. Resolution XIII of the XXIII Pan American Sanitary Conference grants broad mandates to the Organization to act on the new priority, which is the core around which the strategic orientations of PAHO for the quadrennium 1991-1994 are grouped. Resolution XI of the same Conference complements Resolution XIII in regard to health and environment.

In response to the deterioration of the infrastructure in the countries of the Region and their sanitary and social weaknesses, as dramatically evidenced by the virulent outbreaks of epidemic cholera in several countries, the increase in poisonings caused by pesticides and other toxic chemicals, the rise in industrial accidents with environmental repercussions, and similar problems, the Pan American Health Organization, among other initiatives, has developed the Regional Plan for Investment in the Environment and Health, which was approved by the Governing Bodies and is aimed at addressing the health needs and the social deficit in the countries.

The Ninth Program of Work of the World Health Organization (1996-2001) maintains health for all by the year 2000 as the point of reference for the Organization's actions, and includes targets that are consistent with others already established by other forums and agencies. The Program proposes to move from a traditional approach to environmental health to a more comprehensive and intersectoral approach.

In sum, the health sector in the Region has been concerned with health problems as they relate to the environment and development. However, its concerns and needs have not been sufficiently meshed with those of other sectors to produce the close integration that is needed to achieve the best results for protection of the environment, development, and human health.

Parallel to aforementioned events and initiatives, the last two decades have witnessed growing public concern over the world environment. The most notable recent expression of these concerns was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro from 3-14 June 1992. The Conference acknowledged the importance of health in sustainable development, and environmental protection and conservation. Thus, UNCED, through its plan of action, provided the opportunity to integrate health with environmental protection in the development process.

1.2 The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

The basic idea behind the Conference was to build a consensus on actions and principles aimed at ensuring that the inhabitants of the Earth enjoy sustainable development with equity. PAHO/WHO participated actively in the preparatory activities for the Conference and in the Conference itself. It made a valuable contribution in the preparatory stage of the Conference to the Rio Declaration and to the drafting of Agenda 21, which is the Conference's plan of action. A summary of the implications of UNCED for the countries and for PAHO can be found in the "Report on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and its Implications for the Work of the Pan American Health Organization," Document CD36/22 of 17 August 1992, presented to the XXXVI Meeting of the Directing Council.

At the global level, Resolution WHA45.31 summarizes the significance of the Conference for WHO as a whole. In compliance with that resolution, WHO has developed a Global Strategy on Health and Environment (Geneva, 7 September 1992). It should be noted that one of the most pertinent recommendations of UNCED is that the countries should prepare plans for adopting priority measures in the program areas of the chapter "Protecting and Promoting Human Health Conditions," based on cooperative planning at the different levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and local communities.

Since improved health generally goes hand-in-hand with the need to consider environmental health in the broad context of environment and development, any success attained as a consequence of UNCED in regard to health will depend, in large measure, on how the initiative is followed up and on the support provided by the Organization to the countries, which in turn will depend on the capacity it demonstrates to mobilize additional and new financial resources. Indeed, Agenda 21 asks the governing bodies of organizations to study the need for additional resources that will be required for follow-up, and proposes some mechanisms to further the process.

Aware of the shortfalls in the health and environment infrastructure, PAHO, with the support of the governments, has sponsored the development, drafting, and implementation of the Regional Plan for Investment in the Environment and Health (Pan

American Health Organization, September 1992), which will make a major contribution to the attainment of the health goals of UNCED by promoting, at the country and regional levels, a movement aimed at increasing capital investment in the environment and health. For this purpose, the Organization is endeavoring to help the countries to strengthen their capacity to identify and formulate investment projects.

1.3 Factors Considered with regard to the Conference on Health, Environment, and Development Proposed by PAHO

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) made an important contribution to promoting a regional vision of environmental problems, in keeping with UNCED. Their initiative took the form of a report entitled "Our Own Agenda," which reflects the thinking, analysis, and discussion on the issue in past decades in the Region and advances suggestions for a future strategy.

Through the Latin American and Caribbean Commission on Development and the Environment, which was created on the initiative of UNDP and IDB in 1989, a select group of experts and scientists of recognized prestige in the Region helped to prepare the report. The regional offices of UNDP, the Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of UNEP, ECLAC, the Project Services Office of UNDP, and the Pan American Health Organization also participated, together with various offices of the United Nations system and the Inter-American Development Bank.

In 1990, WHO created a Health and Environment Commission to evaluate the health consequences of environmental changes, especially with a view to preparing for UNCED. The work of the Commission can be considered a complement, in the field of health, to the 1987 report "Our Common Future" prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The results of that work took the form of a report by the Commission entitled "Our Planet, Our Health," and reports by the subcommissions on the subjects of food and agriculture, energy, industry and urbanization. These reports offer strategies and recommendations for establishing a sustainable base for the protection of health.

As a part of the process of preparing for UNCED, the countries organized special working groups to write up national reports, which were to examine the issue of environment and development, incorporating health concerns and needs. As a contribution to this process, PAHO promoted the active participation of the countries' health sectors in the working groups with a view to ensuring that sufficient account was taken of health concerns. However, in the Region, participation by the health sector in the preparation of the national documents in question, and in UNCED, was relatively limited, partly owing to a lack of information and relevant experience, and partly to the lack of recognition by other sectors that health is an integral and inseparable part of

environment and development issues. The foregoing points up the utmost importance and urgency of coordinating with the other sectors, especially in regard to the environment and development, in order to significantly facilitate participation by the health sector in the follow-up on UNCED, beginning with the preparation of plans for the adoption of priority measures, both at the country level and between countries.

Implementation of Agenda 21 is the responsibility first and foremost of governments, and international cooperation should support such efforts, which is why reinforcement is essential and urgent. UNCED recommended increasing the internal capacity of countries to carry out Agenda 21 and called for the preparation of national programs of action on the Agenda, including an examination of requirements for increasing the capacity and potential for preparing national strategies for sustainable development, preferably before 1994. Determination of national capacity and needs will require the broadest possible degree of internal consultation, as well as consultation with governmental, nongovernmental, international, bilateral, and other levels that can contribute to the effort. The recommendation of Agenda 21 to strengthen national capacity is consistent with Resolution XIII of the XXXVI Meeting of the Directing Council.

The operational mechanisms at the country level used to prepare the contributions for UNCED were intersectoral working groups. Groups of this kind can facilitate the consultation process. The high-level commissions that Resolution XIII of the XXXVI Directing Council suggests be established in the countries can also play an important part. The purpose of these commissions is to make action in the fields of health and the environment more effective by including health in the guidelines for environmental and development policies, and in operational activities. This requires an understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the environment and the needs of the population of the countries in question.

Several countries of the Region have manifested interest and have begun activities to follow up on UNCED through the consolidation of their health and environment policies. For example, the Central American countries have formulated a Declaration on the Ecology and Health of the Central American Isthmus, which demonstrates their interest in reaching a consensus among the different national sectors with regard to health, the environment, and development.

Worldwide, the international agencies responsible for implementing the resolutions of UNCED have begun activities at different levels, guided by the policies of their own organizations and the directives of UNCED. Some of the most noteworthy actions include:

- The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) has established a Commission on Sustainable Development within the Council, to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, and to examine progress in the execution of Agenda 21 at the national, regional, and international levels, among other related matters. Implicit in this mandate is an examination of the progress made in implementing the recommendations related to health.
- The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has launched a global program to develop national capacity, intended to support the preparation and execution of plans of action and world strategies for sustainable development. The activities will be carried out at the direct request of governments, or in cooperation with a United Nations agency. The pilot stage calls for financing of US\$10 million, with a target of \$100 million for 1992, and \$500 million in 1995.
- The Global Environment Facility (GEF). This fund, administered jointly by UNDP, the World Bank, and UNEP, is carrying out a pilot project (1991-1993) in cooperation with the countries to address four global environmental problems: (i) global warming; (ii) destruction of biodiversity; (iii) pollution of international waters; and (iv) damage to the ozone layer. In chapter 33 of Agenda 21, "Financial Resources and Mechanisms," UNCED made specific recommendations related to financing additional costs, particularly for developing countries. Countries that have a per capita GDP of US\$4,000 or less will be able to benefit.

It is to be expected that additional resources will be forthcoming to fulfill the commitments outlined in chapters 37 and 38 of Agenda 21 of UNCED, which call for international cooperation to strengthen national capacities. The health sector has had very little participation in all these processes. Consequently, intensive action is needed in the very near future, with a firm sense of political commitment in order to promote the integration of the health sector with all the sectors involved in the health-environment-development triangle.

In view of the background presented above, it is clear that a Pan American Conference on Health, Environment, and Development is not only necessary and timely, but is urgent if the health sector is to contribute more effectively to the process of sustainable development and, in turn, is to derive more benefit from it.

2. THE PAN AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Purpose of the Conference

Through a joint effort, it is proposed to define and adopt a set of common policies in the Member Countries aimed at ensuring fulfillment of the commitments stemming from UNCED and meeting the health needs of the countries of the Region. The Strategic Orientations and Program Priorities of PAHO, the Ninth General Program of Work of WHO, and the Regional Plan for Investment in the Environment and Health, as well as other related plans and processes, contain major components that should be duly considered and incorporated in national and intercountry plans of action for health, the environment, and sustainable development.

2.2 Terms of Reference of the Conference

The areas of action established under Agenda 21 of UNCED incorporate the objectives of sustainable development and primary health care, taking environmental requirements into account. The linkage between sanitary, environmental, and socioeconomic progress is intended to ensure sustainable development. These intersectoral activities encompass the spheres of education, housing, natural resources, industrial and agricultural development, public works, community groups, companies, schools and universities, religious, civic, and cultural organizations, and others. It is recommended that the countries prepare national plans of action for cooperation among the various levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and local communities. At the global level, UNCED suggested that these health-related activities should be guided by an appropriate international organization, such as WHO.

In addition, one aspect of utmost importance that must be dealt with, and which requires consensus at the highest level internationally, is the fact that countries and groups of countries share certain environmental and health components related to economic development, and these components take on even greater significance for sustainable development.

2.3 Immediate Objective

The immediate objective is to hold a regional conference to be attended by participants from the highest levels of the health and other sectors, mainly those linked to the environment and the economic and social development of the countries, to help lay the necessary foundations so that the health sector can fulfill the mandate it is called upon to carry out pursuant to UNCED, particularly as set out in chapter 6 of Agenda 21, "Protecting and Promoting Human Health," and make a significant contribution to

sustainable development in the countries. To this end, the other related sectors must have a clear idea of the needs of the health sector and a full understanding of the principles and policies that will guide intersectoral cooperation, both at the country level and in the Region.

2.4 Expected Results

One of the principal results expected from the conference is that it will contribute to the involvement of the various sectors that are concerned with environmental health and help to ensure that their needs will be included in national plans of action on the environment, in accordance with the recommendations of Agenda 21. A fundamental step in achieving this involvement would be acceptance of the Pan American Charter on Health, Environment, and Development, which the conference would place before the participants for consideration.

One major result of the process itself of preparing the Pan American Charter and holding the conference would be the activation of high-level national mechanisms to define the policies and strategic elements needed and to promote the preparation of operational instruments that will permit the inclusion of the concerns of all the sectors of society and the efforts of different groups to attain health objectives. In this context the Regional Plan for Investment in the Environment and Health will be expected to play a key role in support of the countries with regard to redirecting social-sector investment policies for the purpose of increasing the flow of capital needed to overcome the existing sanitary and health deficits.

For the Organization, the Pan American Charter on Health, Environment, and Development would constitute a guiding instrument for its programs, complementing the Resolutions of the Governing Bodies on related matters. It is also expected that the Charter would serve as a guide for defining the strategic orientations and program priorities of the Organization during the next quadrennium. Also, the Governments would be encouraged to take the Pan American Charter into account when formulating their national health, environment, and development policies.

2.5 Development Plan

Stage I. Preparatory Activities

The first stage in the preparatory activities will be the drafting of the Pan American Charter, which will involve all the countries of the Region, in accordance with the following plan:

- The country documents prepared for UNCED will be analyzed in order to identify and define the health concerns and needs expressed by the countries, with a view to establishing the initial basic requirements that should be incorporated into the national plans of action. If necessary, additional data will be obtained from the countries in order to complete this initial information base.
- The information compiled will be consolidated in a document that will serve as the basis for the preparation of a first draft of the Pan American Charter on Health, Environment, and Development, which will incorporate the policies and strategic elements so as to present an integrated whole that takes into account all the social sectors and the efforts of the different sectors.
- Based on an analysis of the consolidated document, a first draft of the Pan American Charter on Health, Environment, and Development will be prepared, which will be submitted for consideration by each Member Government.
- The consolidated document and the first draft of the Charter will be discussed with the appropriate national authorities in each country through the national commissions that worked on the preparation of the country's documents for UNCED, and in coordination with the high-level commissions established in accordance with Resolution XIII of the XXXVI Directing Council.
- The input resulting from the discussions in the countries will be used to prepare the preliminary version of the Pan American Charter on Health, Environment, and Development, which will be submitted for consideration by the conference, together with the updated consolidated background document, for discussion and the adoption of a final version of the Charter.

Stage II. The Conference

The conference will be held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, in June 1994, and will last for three days.

A total of 100 ministerial-level participants will be invited. They will include Ministers of Health and other ministers who have major responsibilities with regard to policies and decisions on the environment and development. The countries may send additional participants with funding from other sources. International organizations, bilateral agencies, and nongovernmental organizations will also be invited to participate actively in the event, as well as to provide support for the participation of some of those invited to attend.

The agenda of the meeting will be prepared well in advance and will provide for plenary sessions to present the main topics, plenary discussion meetings, and working groups to revise and reconcile the texts.

Stage III. Publication and Complementary Activities

The Pan American Charter on Health, Environment, and Development will be translated into all the languages of the Region and distributed widely to health authorities at all levels, as well as to other sectors, educational and civic institutions, nongovernmental groups, professional associations, bilateral agencies, and intergovernmental organizations, in order to give them the opportunity to consider its contents and contribute to the effort to strengthen national and international capabilities. It will be also distributed to other interested parties who have responsibilities with regard to health, the environment, and development.

2.6 Resources for the Conference

The physical and institutional infrastructure will be provided by the Pan American Health Organization. The conference speakers will receive additional support from other international and bilateral agencies. Financial resources will be also contributed by various national and international agencies concerned with the subject of the conference.

The estimated costs of the conference and the preparatory activities are:

Drafting of the Pan American Charter	US\$40,000.00
Preparation of the conference documents	15,000.00
Expenses of conference participants	250,000.00
Conference infrastructure	50,000.00
Publication of the proceedings of the conference and the Pan American Charter	25,000.00
Contingencies	<u>20,000.00</u>
Total	\$400,000.00

PAHO would contribute 55 % (\$220,000) of the total and 45 % (\$180,000) would be contributed by other sources.