
Director's Letter

INDEXED



HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

In the wake of the economic instability and stagnation that is the legacy of the 1980s, the current decade will be a critical period of revision of development values and strategies in most countries of the Region. The health sector can and should contribute to this revision. Past development planning took little heed of health goals, but the economic crisis brutally demonstrated the close relationship between health and development and the defenselessness of society's most vulnerable groups in the face of financial pressures.

The health sector has a compelling duty to learn how economic policies influence the health of the population and to fight to ensure that "impact on health" is viewed as a yardstick against which development strategies should be measured. Although some may argue that our expertise lies elsewhere, we must recognize that development is not the province of the economists alone. The Organization is committed to explore all possible means of cooperation with its Member Countries in the protection of their human capital, and of human life itself, and to that end we offer the following defining characteristics of a just and equitable development policy:

- (1) Development must be oriented toward the fulfillment of human potential and vitality, of which health is an intrinsic component. Health must be considered as a precondition of productivity and well-being rather than merely a result of economic output.
- (2) Development is intimately related to the practice and strengthening of the democratic process. It must stem from the expression of the people's will through that process, rather than from centralized decision making.
- (3) Development demands that the State play a strong role in the defense of equity. Not only must the State reduce its direct productive function in favor of private productive activities, it must also serve to correct distortions and regulate the distribution of development's benefits so that the groups with the least power to compete in the free market will not continue to be marginalized. Equity also implies a direct responsibility on the part of the State to promote, organize, and even provide basic social services, such as health services.
- (4) Development entails increased cooperation among countries. Regional integration is an essential tactic for progress in today's world.
- (5) Development requires each society to mobilize all its assets, including natural resources. The use of these resources must be guided by a vision of long-term, sustainable development, which implies the preservation of the environment.
- (6) Development also demands active participation in the world's economic and political arenas.

People are the driving force behind development, and a future of peace, progress, and stability depends on giving priority to the needs and rights of all the people of the Americas. Whatever the effort and resources that must be invested in this enterprise, they will be small compared with the riches that a healthy and productive population represents for the Region.



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