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COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE HEALTH FIELD IN THE AMERICAS

At its 72nd Meeting, the Executive Committee discussed ways and means of improving external cooperation in the health field with a view to gradually attaining maximum efficiency and effectiveness. It considered the possibility of making periodic studies in the countries, based on their policies, strategies and programs, with a view to channeling, evaluating and coordinating all technical advisory services or investments, from whatever source. Meetings for this purpose would be organized in conjunction with PAHO/WHO and other competent international bodies. The general purpose would be to steer the work of the international agencies, multilateral or bilateral, toward the national and continental objectives laid down in the Ten-Year Health Plan for 1971-1980.

The Executive Committee instructed the Director to prepare a document on the item to facilitate discussion by the XIX Pan American Sanitary Conference.

The proposed approach for discussion at the Conference is clearly based on Chapter II, Article 2(a) and (b) of the Constitution of the World Health Organization, which reads:

- (a) to act as the directing and co-ordinating authority on international health work;
- (b) to establish and maintain effective collaboration with the United Nations, specialized agencies, governmental health administrations, professional groups and such other organizations as may be deemed appropriate.

This proposal is in keeping with the oft-reiterated interest of the Director-General of WHO in increasing the effectiveness of coordination among all the institutions contributing to the effort made by the various countries as reflected in their health policies. His statements to the Twenty-sixth World Health Assembly and to Regional Committees bear witness to this purpose, which he regards as vital to the work of the Organization.

During the 1960's, and during the present decade so far, the progress made in all the countries of the Hemisphere in regard to the programming of external cooperation in the health field has been noteworthy.

The factors which have contributed to the change, and continue to do so, are the following:

1. The systematic effort by the Governments over the last 13 years to upgrade their own national planning processes, both in the health sector and in relation to the other sectors of development.

2. The Ten-Year Health Plan for the Americas (1971-1980) to which all the Governments of the Hemisphere have subscribed.

3. Cooperation by the Pan American Health Organization with the countries in crystallizing their planning processes and perfecting the programming of their activities. Noteworthy among the various forms which these efforts have taken are the following:

3.1 The various resolutions of the Governing Bodies promoting, directing and supporting the activities of the countries and the Organization designed to develop their planning and programming processes.

3.2 The work of the Pan American Center for Health Planning in two substantive fields:

- Systematic research into the conceptual and methodological problems of planning and the techniques and instruments for analysis and programming applicable to the needs and potentialities of the countries, according to the peculiarities of the different processes.
- Training of officials of the various countries in these matters. From the date of its establishment until now, the Center, in conjunction with national courses, has provided information and training to 3,027 health professionals in the Hemisphere.

3.3 The designing, upgrading and implementation of the quadrennial projections system and the information-evaluation-decision-making systems carried out jointly by the national health authorities and officials of the Pan American Health Organization.

4. International cooperation inside and outside the United Nations System, on the basis of the countries' economic and social development plan and health programs. Thus the wishes of the Governments have coincided with the PAHO/WHO aim of ensuring the greatest possible effectiveness of external investment, avoiding costly duplication of effort and waste of the scarce resources available.

In the light of the foregoing, it can be said that the Region of the Americas is equipped for the efficient channeling and coordination of international assistance based on the country planning processes.

Nevertheless, more complete and timely information is needed on the decisions of Governments, establishing a systematic dialogue between the responsible national officials and the programmers of external assistance that will ensure consistency and relevance between this assistance and the countries' health programs. Whatever the method used, it is vitally important that the information should reach all decision-making levels, national, international or interagency, if cooperation is to be adequate and effective.

To ensure this dialogue and to improve the current practices and procedures, it is proposed that country meetings be held on a periodic basis in which the Governments would indicate their external technical assistance needs to the interested agencies on the basis of the health policies, strategies and programs decided upon by each country. These meetings would provide a useful dialogue, enabling international cooperation to be conducted on the basis of a precise knowledge of national plans and of personal contact with the officials responsible for the implementation of programs.

If these systematic meetings are to be useful for the purpose intended, it is felt that they should come as the final stage of a process of preparation carried out in the country and consisting essentially of the national programming. Once a country's health policy has been defined, the national authorities should design the consequent health programs and make an analysis of any external assistance these might require. Following approval by the Minister of Health, the scheme would be considered by the Ministry, Board, or Commission for National Planning, and through such body by the other development sectors playing a part in health programs. Thus both the national proposals and those concerned with external cooperation would carry the proper weight and constitute a sufficiently sound basis for the proposed meeting.

To this end it is felt that application of the system of quadrennial projections is of fundamental importance. As this system becomes more general and more sophisticated, and the systematic organization of the type of meetings we are proposing is developed, it should become one of the main instruments for defining PAHO/WHO cooperation and channeling the participation of other agencies.

The Pan American Sanitary Bureau is well qualified to cooperate with the countries by providing the necessary organization and coordination for the institutionalization of the meetings. These would be properly programmed and would constitute the culmination of a prior process carried out in each country. This, as already mentioned, is the prerequisite for making full use of this dialogue between the countries and external cooperation agencies.

The objectives, content and organization of the meetings would be as follows:

1. Purpose

To define the orientation and general content of external assistance on the basis of the health policy and program as decided by the country. The analysis made would include an examination of the national strategies adopted for implementing the program.

This examination would make it possible:

- To look into possibilities for collaboration by PAHO and any other international and/or bilateral agency;
- To analyze the results and development of national and external cooperation programs so as to be able to identify critical areas and promote new types of advisory services and investments; and, consequently,
- To direct the programming of PAHO activities in coordination with other agencies.

2. Content

- Presentation by each country of its policy and the medium-term programming arising therefrom.
- National analysis of the external assistance and other requirements considered essential.
- Joint discussion of country proposals by the national representatives and the PAHO team, with the participation of other agencies.
- Preparation of a document summarizing the proposals discussed and the main conclusions reached.

This document, duly authorized by the country itself, would constitute basic information and reference material, enabling the country and the international agencies to make decisions and to program external assistance activities. In particular, it would facilitate coordination between PAHO/WHO and the other agencies.

3. Participants

For the country:

It is essential that national participation be representative of the decision-making and implementation levels so that their proposals have the backing of prior agreement, intrasectoral and intersectoral, within the country, at the highest level.

For PAHO:

The Director or his representative, departments and technical units concerned with the country proposals, the Zone Chief, and the PAHO Representative in the country concerned.

For other agencies:

Participation at the invitation of PAHO by all international agencies considered appropriate by the country, and any that express an interest in participating in the dialogue.

4. Duration

The presentation by the country and its subsequent discussion would take up four complete sessions on two consecutive days.

The Secretariat would prepare and duly communicate a draft of the document summarizing the discussions and conclusions, and once this had been revised and approved by the country it would become an information and reference document for the programming of international assistance.

5. Frequency

It is suggested that the meetings be held in each country every three years, subject to such variations as the circumstances dictate, at the discretion of the Governments.

6. Budget

Once the Conference has approved the scheme as submitted for its consideration, the Secretariat will draw up the relevant budget with a view to making a start during 1975, in at least six countries, with the process of "Coordination of International Cooperation in the Health Field in the Americas."