
Abstracts and Reports



Sustainable Development in the Caribbean

Two recent international conferences have tackled the question of how to achieve sustainable development under the special conditions prevailing in small island states. The first conference, held in Nassau, Bahamas, on 8–11 November 1993, addressed the specific issue of sustainable tourism development. Participants at the First Conference on Environmental Health and Sustainable Tourism Development attempted to integrate and consolidate subregional responses to problems associated with expanding and maintaining the tourism industry, which is so vital to the economies of the Caribbean, while protecting the quality of the environment—the resource on which that industry is based. The conference was hosted by the Government of the Bahamas and included wide representation from the Caribbean area, in addition to participants from Canada, the United States, and Latin America.

One of the featured speakers was PAHO Assistant Director Sir George Alleyne. In his address, he spoke of the relationship that should exist between environmental health and tourism, particularly in the local context, stating that the focus must be not only the safety of tourists but also environmental health protection and pro-

motion among the local population; this perspective is essential to the sustainability of tourism development. He stressed the importance of information for the promotion of environmental health, as well as the role PAHO can play in collecting that information and providing it to policy makers, practitioners, communities, and individuals—both residents and tourists.

Another speaker was Mr. Michael King, Director of the Office of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States in the Bahamas. He emphasized that the tourism sector must become more actively involved in environmental health management because of the ongoing degradation of environmental quality. Some of the most visible examples of this problem have sprung from improper wastewater treatment and inadequate disposal of solid waste.

Among the main issues discussed at the conference were water conservation, solid waste management, sewage disposal and coastal pollution, preservation of marine biodiversity, environmental health and port services, protection of coastal and marine resources, institutional strengthening, environmental monitoring, and regional standards and guides for tourism planning. Supplementary activities included extensive exhibitions by both local and international groups and three field trips to areas in the Bahamas that typified some of the issues being discussed.

Sources: (1) First Conference on Environmental Health and Sustainable Tourism Development. *CCH Update* Sep-Dec 1993;6(3):6–7. (2) Special Report on SIDS. *CCH Update* Jan-Apr 1994;7(1):6–7.

The conference recommended the establishment of a Consultative Group to guide and plan further activities. It also drafted and endorsed a declaration representing the views of 25 sovereign governments and territories in the Caribbean area. The declaration recommended that the governments of the subregion adopt an environmental policy in collaboration with the tourism sector, incorporating the following principles:

- a unified and regional approach to the management of environmental resources, including monitoring of environmental quality;
- improved environmental management practices in the planning, design, construction, and operation of all hotels and other tourist-related facilities;
- increased participation by the private sector (including the cruise ship industry, hotels, NGOs, etc.) in national tourism and environment programs, and the development and operation of mechanisms for better coordination between the public and private sectors;
- institutional strengthening in both the public and private sectors in the field of tourism and environment, taking advantage of the technical resources available in the Region through technical and academic institutions and international organizations;
- mobilization of technical and financial resources from internal and external sources to achieve effective program implementation;
- training of public and private sector staff, including environmental health officers and hotel workers, in practices conducive to supporting environmental health and tourism;
- education of the public to increase awareness in order to achieve greater

public participation and involvement; and

- application and enforcement of existing legislation aimed at protecting the environment.

The conference also approved a recommendation from the Government of Saint Lucia to integrate its proposals into the Program of Action for the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which was held in Barbados in April 1994 and was attended by representatives of 41 island states from around the world.

According to United Nations Secretary General Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the SIDS conference was part of the process set in motion at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At that earlier conference, small island developing states had been recognized as having unique environmental problems because of their extreme vulnerability to ecological disturbance, as well as their small size, geographic isolation, and limited resources, and it had been agreed that these states warranted special cooperation and assistance from the international community.

The major outcome of the SIDS conference was a Program of Action that consolidated plans for the support of sustainable development on small island developing states and the utilization of their marine and coastal resources in such a way that essential human needs are met, biodiversity is maintained, and the quality of life of the inhabitants is improved. The Program of Action also addresses measures to allow these states to cope with environmental changes and to reduce threats to marine and coastal resources.

In addition, the key issues addressed by the Program of Action go well beyond

environmental protection, encompassing human development topics such as population policy, education and training, poverty, urbanization, and female participation in development, as well as the relation of these topics to health. Sir George Alleyne, who headed the WHO delegation at the conference, pointed out that the Rio Declaration, which arose from UNCED, states that "Human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." He also insisted that, rather than being viewed as an adjunct to human development, health must be viewed as a resource in its own right, one that

is fundamental to the production and use of all the other resources that contribute to national development.

The conference also produced the Declaration of Barbados, which affirms that small island developing states should, in accordance with their own priorities, strive toward the goals of sustainable development by means of strategies and programs aimed at improving the quality of life. The declaration also stresses the responsibility and role of the international community to provide financial assistance and promote fair, equitable, and nondiscriminatory trading arrangements and a supportive international economic system.



Strengthening the Health Infrastructure through Disease Control: The Polio Eradication Study

In August 1994, three years had elapsed since the detection of the last case of paralytic poliomyelitis caused by wild poliovirus in the Region of the Americas. Countries are now carrying out activities related to certifying the disease's eradication, which entails surveillance of acute flaccid paralysis and wild virus circulation.

The poliomyelitis eradication effort has required a unique concerted effort by national governments and a consortium of donor agencies. Given that the duration of the combined effort and the degree of joint planning and program execution were unprecedented in a health campaign, it was considered worthwhile to study what, if any, impact that effort has had on the strengthening of health infrastructure. Therefore, in 1993 PAHO commissioned a group of independent investigators from a variety of fields to carry out an extensive review of the ramifications of the program in six countries of the Region: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Paraguay.

Preliminary data from this study indicate that the Expanded Program on Im-

Sources: (1) PAHO/HMP/EPI. Expanded Program on Immunization. Washington, DC: PAHO; 26 April 1994. (Document CE113/11; report to the 113th Meeting of the Executive Committee). (2) Provisional Report of the Taylor Commission to Assess the Impact of EPI-Polio on Health Systems in the Americas. Presented at the Fourth Meeting of the Taylor Commission in Washington, DC, 24 June 1994. (Unpublished document).