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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA

(Submitted by the World Health Organization)

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Health services are an integral part of economic and social development programmes. This fact was recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution on the Development Decade when it included among the approaches and measures designed to accelerate progress in the growth of the social and economic advancement of Member States those which "accelerate the elimination of illiteracy, hunger and disease, which seriously affect the productivity of the people of the less-developed countries," and also those "for further promoting education in general and vocational and technical training in the developing countries . . . in the fields of . . . health," as well as the intensification of research and the development of statistical facilities. Health services need, therefore, to find their place in any scheme of economic and social development.

In Africa, the World Health Organization has been assisting countries in strengthening their health services through three of its regional offices - those for Africa, for the Eastern Mediterranean and for Europe. The budget of the Organization for field activities in Africa during 1963 provides over US\$ 15 000 000. A number of projects assisted by WHO receive supplies and equipment from UNICEF. Health projects are always undertaken at the request of the government and in close co-operation with it. The WHO regional offices are guided by regional committees which meet yearly to discuss health programmes for the different countries and to review the programme and budget proposals of the regional directors. In this way, inter-country assistance and co-operation, which is of particular importance in Africa, is encouraged.

The Fifteenth World Health Assembly, in May 1962, approved an accelerated programme for assisting newly-independent and emerging States, particularly in Africa, in pursuit of the aims of the United Nations Development Decade, and outlined a health programme

based on sound planning, giving due importance to the education and training of personnel. In addition, it recommended to governments that they undertake ten-year health programmes within the framework of the Development Decade, adopting, as appropriate, the components and targets suggested by the Director-General.

With the same objective, WHO has made arrangements to work closely with the African Institute for Economic and Social Development. It proposes to appoint a public health adviser to the staff of the Institute to teach the role of health aspects in socio-economic development to trainees from various national administrative departments, and will supply technical information required for planning the health sector of a national development programme, for example, the health status of the population, priorities for action, and financial and administrative requirements for health services. Close collaboration is maintained with all other international and bilateral aid programmes in Africa and, at the request of governments, WHO can assist in co-ordinating bilateral and multilateral activities in the field of health.

In some cases, WHO provides operational assistance to fill gaps in the maintenance of a minimum skeleton staff, essential for tiding over a critical situation in the development of basic health services and to raise health services of countries where the services are below standard. Such operational staff is placed at the disposal of governments concerned and is under the administrative control of the government. This assistance is only available to countries which are making every effort to achieve self-sufficiency in the shortest possible time and to meet the costs of essential medical and paramedical staff from their own resources.

Although WHO does not furnish capital investment funds for buildings, etc. it can help governments to build up the necessary infra-structure for assisting and developing economic programmes and for raising the standard of living and productivity level of the population.

The following paragraphs describe the most important aspects of the Organization's assistance to Africa.

## 1. Strengthening of public health services

Strengthening of public health services, especially in the newly-independent countries, is one of the main objectives of the Organization. Campaigns against specific diseases are organized in such a way as to contribute to the strengthening of health services in the largest possible way. The policy of the Organization aims at the establishment of an effective machinery able to deal with both preventive and curative services within a balanced health programme. Ministries of health are showing an increasing interest in the administrative aspects of public health and public health legislation is also becoming a matter of much interest. WHO endeavours to provide public health advisers in every country, wherever possible and, where this is not possible, a representative of WHO for a group of countries advises the regional offices on problems and requirements. Projects designed to strengthen the national health services are, to cite only a few, those in Basutoland - development of rural health services; Gabon - assistance to the establishment of an institute of hygiene; Ghana - advisory services (public health administration); Kenya - public health study, and aid to virus diagnostic laboratory.

## 2. Health planning

In its "Five-Year Perspective 1960-1964", the Committee on Programme Appraisals of the Economic and Social Council reported two years ago that: "National development plans are now an established pattern in many countries throughout the less-developed regions of the world and their formulation and execution are a matter of profound concern to those countries. These trends provide an opportunity that needs to be further developed for concerted action within the United Nations family." The Fifteenth World Health Assembly, recognizing the importance of planning, established a special scheme of assistance to newly-independent and emerging countries in national health planning activities, related to the current and prospective socio-economic development of each country. Such plans involve the study and investigation of health needs in terms of building facilities, equipment and personnel, with a view to determining the priorities for action and the most economic and efficient ways for implementing them. The plan serves as a guide for developing and strengthening the

necessary health services, for making the required adjustments in its implementation and for eventually assessing achievements. Moreover, it will help international and other outside agencies to concentrate their assistance on nationally established priorities, thus ensuring that the resources available have a maximal benefit.

The need to expand narrow technical concepts of health, illness and disease, to include interrelated social factors having a bearing on individual and community welfare, has been stressed to governments. The link between poverty and disease formed by malnutrition, insanitary environment and inadequate housing is nowhere of greater importance than in tropical areas. The depressing effect of ill-health on the working capacity and output of the national labour force is often of most serious import.

There are national development plans established, or being established in many of the countries in Africa. Where this is the case, a sound national health plan is set up within, and closely correlated to the over-all national development plan. One example of this type of activity is the WHO project in Upper Volta which aims to assist the Government in organizing their national health service and in setting up a vital and health statistics unit in the Ministry of Health. WHO is providing a public health administrator and a statistician. The public health administrator submitted proposals for the organization of rural health services, integration of preventive and curative services, maternal and child health, etc. on a decentralized, regional administrative basis, which have been approved by that Government's committee of public health of the national five-year plan. Many other projects of this kind are in the active planning stage, such as those in Mali, Niger, Togo and Madagascar.

### 3. Education and training

Medical education and training of national staff has always been a field of primary interest to the Organization and the Fifteenth World Health Assembly has again called attention to the need for expansion and acceleration of programmes in this domain, setting certain targets for Africa regarding the ratio of medical and health personnel to population to be achieved by 1970. More emphasis is being laid on the training of health workers in their own country, rather than abroad. WHO has an Africa-wide

programme of assistance in the establishment of schools for the training of paramedical and auxiliary medical workers. These schools take the form of rural training centres, auxiliary training centres, demonstration areas, etc. At present WHO is giving assistance, in co-operation with UNICEF, to auxiliary and rural training establishments in Ghana, Eastern and Western Nigeria, Tanganyika, Chad, Guinea, Gabon, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Upper Volta. Tunisia and Ethiopia are receiving WHO assistance in developing plans for medical education. Assistance is also given to established medical schools such as those in the United Arab Republic (Egypt), Tunisia and the Sudan, and to schools of hygiene, schools of nursing and training courses of health inspectors and other auxiliary health personnel. WHO assistance to schools of medicine in the field of paediatrics continued to develop in Makerere College, Uganda, University College, Ibadan, Nigeria and similar aid is under preparation in connexion with the University of Dakar, Senegal. The Higher Institute of Public Health in Alexandria, which receives WHO assistance, serves not only as a training ground for public health workers, but also as a place for training doctors from adjacent countries. In Morocco, attention is concentrated on the formation of auxiliary personnel and a WHO team is assisting the country.

For economic purposes, it is necessary to envisage, in Africa, inter-country facilities for training staff, since it is not reasonable to expect all the young African nations to have their own universities; one of the best services that can be rendered by international organizations is to organize training centres on a language and/or geographical regional basis to accelerate the education and training programme for professional Africans. Countries which do not have medical schools are being assisted with undergraduate fellowships and vocational education and training centres have been set up.

#### 4. Communicable diseases

The World Health Organization is making studies to ascertain the incidence of diseases such as malaria, smallpox or other prevalent communicable diseases, which have such an adverse effect on the economic and social well-being of countries, in order that efforts may be made to eradicate them, or at least to reduce their incidence to the point where they cease to be public health problems.

The eradication of malaria is one of the main goals of the Organization, in this decade, since it is a basic step towards the improvement of agricultural development in many countries. In this connexion, the need for a sound national basic health plan is heightened by the need for a proper infra-structure to be set up in the country as a basic requirement before launching a malaria eradication programme.

In Libya, malaria eradication should be achieved in the next four years. Work in South-East and in West Africa, where malaria eradication projects are envisaged to start in the near future, is developing satisfactorily. More evidence has been found of the feasibility of malaria eradication in the various areas of the African region and the Organization is now in a position to start pre-eradication malaria programmes in any country of the region, if funds are available. Efforts are being made to start as many of these programmes as possible in the near future. With a view to meeting the increasing need for trained personnel in various activities supporting the future malaria eradication programme, two centres have been set up, one at Lagos for English-speaking personnel and one at Lomé for French-speaking personnel. A project in Togo is in active planning and aims at setting up a sound malaria pre-eradication programme on the basis of a good local health infra-structure.

With regard to smallpox, a virologist visited the Ivory Coast and the countries immediately surrounding - Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Upper Volta and Ghana - in order to help with co-ordination of the eradication campaign.

##### 5. Environmental health

An ample, conveniently situated supply of pure water is fundamental to a decent standard of living and is of great importance to social and economic development. Proper irrigation engineering, water management and environmental sanitation are important factors in the control of communicable diseases, particularly bilharziasis, and in the promotion of health. WHO is putting at the disposal of governments teams composed of one legal and administrative expert, with experience in the establishment of water-supply schemes; and one financial expert and one sanitary engineer, with extensive experience in the planning and implementation of water-supply programmes on a broad scale. A team of consultants recently visited Liberia, Nigeria and Ghana with a view to formulating plans to expand their water-supply programmes. Training of auxiliaries has also been continued.

6. Conclusion

Only a few examples have been given of the type of activities and of the continuing programmes which WHO is carrying out in Africa. Real advances have been made in the promotion of health and, consequently, social welfare. Countries have become more and more aware of the importance of health in their over-all development. They can judge the basic need for regional co-operation within the framework of the United Nations family, and the effectiveness of technical assistance from international organizations as a potent factor in stimulating action by national governments and in assisting them in their efforts to improve economic conditions and raise levels of living.

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