

UNICEF and WHO: cooperation and coordination

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Policy coordination

WHO and UNICEF Regional Directors' meetings

The two Regional Directors of WHO and UNICEF hold annual meetings during which they review the health status of children and women in the Region and existing regional health policies and strategies, and agree upon common priorities.

Concurrently the Regional Advisers from the two Organizations who participate in their annual meetings discuss the technical details of the agreed priorities and develop a joint annual plan of action. UNICEF also regularly attends the annual WHO Regional Committee sessions as an observer. Over the years this arrangement has resulted in exemplary overall collaboration between the two agencies.

Regional bodies

WHO and UNICEF have developed successful coordination and joint initiatives with regional bodies such as the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Maghreb Union, Organization of African Unity (OAU), Arab Gulf Programme for UN Development Organizations (AGFUND) and Islamic Development Bank. The Arab Plan on Child Welfare, Protection and Development has committed members of the League of Arab States to the achievement of WHO/UNICEF end-decade goals.

Achieving World Health Assembly and World Summit for Children goals

Immunization

There is an excellent collaboration between WHO and UNICEF in support of national immunization programmes. This has resulted in the achievement of high immunization coverage in their corresponding Regions.

Every year WHO and UNICEF invite national programme managers of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) to an intercountry meeting. The meeting provides an excellent opportunity for the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience between the national managers, members of the Regional EPI Technical Advisory Groups and WHO and UNICEF staff. Other collaborating partners which support immunization programmes attend the meetings:

Both organizations have worked together on the eradication of poliomyelitis, neonatal tetanus elimination and measles control. Poliomyelitis eradication activities have included support to national immunization days which have been successfully undertaken in all countries of the Region. UNICEF and WHO have also jointly supported operation MECACAR, the unique collaboration of 18 contiguous countries in Europe, Tunisia, Central and South Asia and the Middle East in conducting national immunization days to

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eradicate poliomyelitis. Joint support has been provided to four subregional meetings on poliomyelitis eradication organized by WHO in Bahrain for the Arabian Peninsula, in Damascus for the Middle East, in Tunisia for the Maghreb countries, and in Teheran for cross-border transmission. In addition, cross-border poliomyelitis eradication activities have been jointly supported in the Islamic Republic of Iran/Afghanistan/Pakistan and Northern Iraq/South-eastern Turkey/Syrian Arab Republic.

Special support has been provided by to countries lagging behind with immunization programmes, such as Djibouti, Sudan and the Republic of Yemen; and countries with special needs, including Iraq. These collaborative efforts include mobilizing resources, strengthening political commitment and fund-raising. In countries affected by war or civil unrest, WHO and UNICEF have been instrumental in brokering periods of tranquillity and corridors of peace.

Control of diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infections

Control of diarrhoeal diseases (CDD) and acute respiratory infections (ARI) remain an area of high priority. For control of diarrhoeal diseases collaboration has included promotion of oral rehydration therapy, prevention activities and the introduction of CDD in the curricula of medical and paramedical schools.

Intercountry meetings on CDD and ARI have been combined since 1996, working towards integrating these programmes under the programme of integrated management of childhood illness (IMCI). These meetings bring together national managers with technical experts in ARI, CDD and related fields. The joint meeting has led to integrated activities in terms of surveying facilities and joint support for the establishment of ARI/diarrhoea training units.

Within the framework of the joint WHO/UNICEF global initiative on IMCI, joint support is being given to the initial three countries which are introducing IMCI: Egypt, Morocco and Sudan.

Nutrition

WHO and UNICEF have had a long and successful collaboration in tackling malnutrition in the Region.

- *National plans of action.* WHO and UNICEF have supported the preparation and implementation of national plans of action on nutrition based on the recommendations of the International Conference on Nutrition and existing plans of action relating to the world summit for children.
- *Breastfeeding.* WHO and UNICEF have jointly supported the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) at different levels of advocacy, training and certification. Both regional offices jointly supported workshops at regional and national levels. Collaboration has included the translation of technical training manuals and health education material. Both regional offices and country representatives coordinate the process of evaluation and certification of baby-friendly hospitals and maternity units.
- *Micronutrients.* The elimination of micronutrient deficiencies has been an important area for joint action.
- *Iodine deficiency disorders:* WHO and UNICEF have assisted countries in assessing their situation with regard to iodine deficiency disorders, and have helped in the adoption of the universal salt iodization strategy. A joint meeting for salt producers was convened in Amman, Jordan, in November 1995 to advocate for universal salt iodization and the introduction of monitoring and evaluation at the community level.

- *Iron deficiency anaemia.* EMRO jointly sponsored a technical consultation on the control of iron deficiency anaemia in October 1995, following which a joint report on guidelines for control of iron deficiency was widely distributed. In October 1996, EMRO jointly sponsored, in collaboration with the Micronutrient Initiative and the Program Against Micronutrient Malnutrition, a workshop on food fortification with micronutrients: the focus was on fortification of flour with iron, where national nutrition managers, industry representatives and technical resource personnel reviewed the potential for fortification in the Region.
- *Vitamin A deficiency.* Both regional offices coordinate their efforts for advocacy, assessment and programming towards the control of vitamin A deficiency in the Region.
- *Nutrition in emergencies.* WHO/UNICEF keep close links when addressing the needs of countries in emergency situations. A joint mission was dispatched to Iraq after the Gulf War in 1991 to assess the situation and help in emergency measures.
- *Low birth weight.* WHO/EMRO participated actively in the regional consultation on low-birth-weight and neonatal mortality held by MENARO in early 1997. There are plans to develop a joint protocol and plans of action for countries with low-birth-weight problems in the Region.

Reproductive health

Joint support has been given to the mother-baby package to accelerate progress towards the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity by assisting countries to deliver simple, comprehensive care to families at the community level. The package was introduced to the Region and both organiza-

tions are assisting countries in introducing it into their national programmes.

Joint intercountry meetings have been held in the Region to address different aspects of reproductive health including a training workshop on reduction of maternal mortality and meetings for prioritizing reproductive health research.

HIV/AIDS prevention and control

Within the framework of UNAIDS the WHO/UNICEF collaboration in this important area has focused on:

- Development of coherent regional strategies and approaches through joint intercountry meetings and participation in each agency's regional HIV/AIDS network meetings;
- Prevention among youth, both in and out of school;
- Development of strategies and essential programming elements for the reduction of perinatal transmission;
- Documentation and dissemination of success stories and lessons learnt in HIV/AIDS prevention and control in the Region.

Adolescent health

A joint WHO/UNICEF intercountry consultation on the health of adolescent girls was held during September 1995 in Paphos, Cyprus. The meeting reviewed the general health status of adolescent girls and made recommendations on major lines of action. UNICEF and WHO are increasingly giving great importance to youth and adolescent health and are coordinating their support to countries.

Programme of action-oriented school health

This project has been implemented on a pilot basis in some countries through collabora-

tion between UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO and ISESCO. The project aims to use schools as an entry point to mobilize and equip the community with preventive health knowledge, and sustain gains in child survival through mobilizing teachers and schools to act as catalysts for community-level preventive health action. The programme also aims to enable primary school aged children to develop self-reliance, problem-solving skills and direct them towards becoming positive participants in the well-being of their families and communities. Thus, the school becomes involved in overall human and community development by integrating health and development into the educational curriculum. A consultative meeting on developing guidelines on methods and techniques of evaluating the prototype action-oriented school health curriculum was held in January 1996 in Khartoum, Sudan.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Within the framework of the joint WHO/UNICEF statement on global monitoring of health for all and health goals of the WSC, joint monitoring mechanisms have been developed over the years.
- Since 1988 WHO and UNICEF have supported the Pan Arab Project for child Development (PAPCHILD) that operates under the auspices of the League of Arab States (LAS). They also supported PAPCHILD's predecessor, the Gulf Health Survey and its later modified version, the Gulf Family Health Survey. PAPCHILD receives financial and technical support from AGFUND, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, UNSO, and LAS and has as its main objective the design, fielding and analysis of a series of country health surveys to examine the health status of children and mothers in the Arab world.

Strong collaboration between the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (MENARO) continued at both regional and country levels. The 1997 annual meeting of Regional Directors of WHO and UNICEF took place in the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in April during which ongoing fields of collaboration were reviewed and areas of future collaboration discussed. The annual meeting of national EPI managers, which was held in Beirut, Lebanon, in May 1997, was jointly sponsored by both Regional Offices.

Source: The Work of WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Annual Report of the Regional Director, 1 January–31 December 1997. Page 12