

Environmental Health Update

Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments



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Focus of the month

What is right about human rights?

While many development professionals have heard of human rights approaches, few profess to know what the concept exactly stands for. Human rights approaches emerged in the early 1990s as an alternative to the economically focused development policies then in vogue¹. The concept made its way into the work of various UN agencies at various speeds. At WHO, human rights were taken early on into the HIV/AIDS programme, and gradually found their way into other programmes. Today, WHO SEARO has conducted a number of human rights related activities that try to streamline the concept with technical program delivery, for instance in environmental health, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

Despite a decade of advocacy efforts, however, the human rights approach has stayed outside the mainstream at most UN agencies. Many development experts remain uninformed or doubtful about the pragmatic value of the

human rights approaches. Public health professionals are more attuned to hard facts and easily definable interventions than to the abstractions and aspirations of the human rights approaches.

At the same time, few development experts dispute the notion that development (health development included) should promote human dignity and non-discrimination. At WHO, most would agree that the Organization should work against ethically problematic health practices, such as the isolation of people with disabilities, the denial of health care to ethnic minorities and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. Many would argue that such work is best done through human rights approaches.

The value of human rights approaches needs to be assessed on its own merit. Human rights approaches – specifically, the application of human rights in health development – are based on human rights norms (i.e. legally binding human rights agreements) and on human rights principles. Individual rights-holders possess human rights, whereas duty-bearers (governments, international organizations) are accountable for their progressive realization, to the maximum of available resources. Human rights principles set out some common elements of human rights norms, such as that human rights are universal and are based on nondiscrimination and equality. Human rights are also interrelated and their realization depends on each other. They must be fulfilled in a participatory and inclusive manner under the rule of law.

While all human rights relate to health, there is also a particular right to health. This right contains both the right to the underlying determinants of health (such as water and nutrition) and the right to health care. The latter is characterized by the following key elements:



¹ Human Rights Council of Australia, *The Rights Way to Development: A Human Rights Approach to Development Assistance: Policy and Practice* (The Human Rights Council of Australia: Maroubra, 1995).

Highlights

- Focus of the Month
- SDE News
- EH News
- Visits and Missions
- Publications and Learning Materials



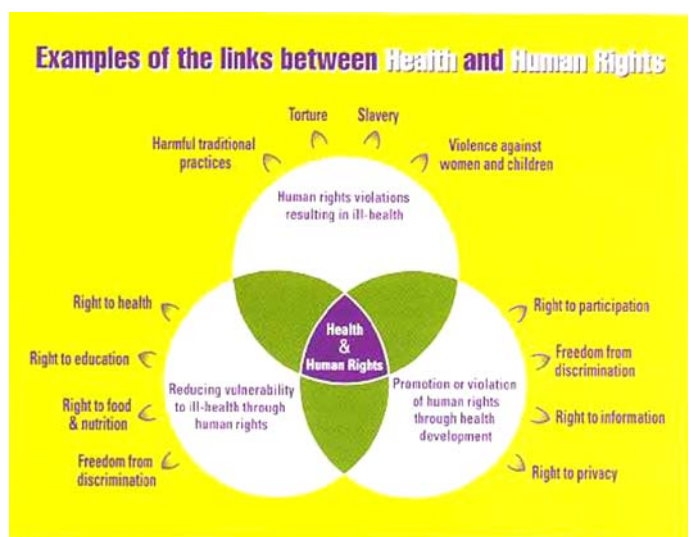
- **Availability:** Functioning public health and health-care facilities, goods and services and programmes have to be available in sufficient quantity.
- **Accessibility:** Health facilities, goods and services have to be accessible and affordable to everyone.
- **Acceptability:** Health facilities, goods and services must be respectful of medical ethics and be culturally appropriate.
- **Quality:** Health facilities, goods and services must be scientifically and medically appropriate and able to produce an effective outcome.

Many of these concepts are familiar to public health experts. The primary health care (PHC) approach, which has been in and out of vogue since the 1970s, shares many elements with modern human rights approaches. The Declaration of Alma-Ata, for instance, identifies health inequalities between and within countries as a common concern of all countries. The declaration calls for people's participation in the planning and implementation of health care and states that health is a fundamental human right.

At the same time, the human rights approach also has distinct conceptual differences from the Alma-Ata Declaration and the PHC approach in general. Primary health care is based on the concept of social justice, which is to be achieved at the national and international levels. Thus, the Alma-Ata Declaration emphasizes self-reliance, self-determination and economic and sociocultural particularities. Human rights approaches, on the other hand, focus on equality and the principle of non-discrimination between individuals and groups. Social equality is thus a part of the human rights approach; but

what is distinctive about the approach is the attention to individuals and groups.

The focus on equality and non-discrimination may be the human rights approach's most distinguishing contribution to health development. Bringing these aspects into the operational reality of WHO's work demands ingenuity and relentless advocacy. The challenge is to find practical applications for these generally abstract and aspirational constructs that define this approach. While this task is difficult, it is not unlike other public health advocacy: all of WHO's activities are aimed towards achieving the ever-elusive goal of health as a complete state of well-being for all; something that may never be fully achieved, yet something we can never cease to aspire to.



SDE News

Maldives holds health awareness workshop for school personnel

The Ministry of Education, Maldives, in collaboration with WHO, held a workshop on health, food safety and nutrition awareness for School Personnel in Male, Maldives on 17-19 August 2008. The workshop provided current health information to practicing school health assistants and parents on good dental hygiene, appropriate food safety practices, recognizing food-related diseases, and nutritional aspects of various foods. This activity is an ongoing part of the national Vision 2020 statement that advocates for "enhancing people's awareness and commitment to healthy lifestyles". For details contact Dr Jorge Mario Luna at lunaj@who.org.mv.



Engaging mind and body.

Kathmandu Workshop advocates for ecological sanitation

With the objective of introducing concepts and principles of ecological sanitation, Kathmandu, Nepal hosted a "Regional Workshop on Ecological Sanitation" from 22-25 September 2008. The workshop reviewed the status of sanitation in regional countries, introduced ecosanitation concepts and discussed the feasibility of implementing such sustainable environmental practices in



Participants visiting a constructed wetland waste water treatment systems in Kathmandu.

countries of South-East Asia. A total of 40 participants attended the workshop, and were exposed to related pilot activities in the Region in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh; WHO presented its guidelines on safe use of excreta, waste water and grey water in agriculture and aquaculture. Participants agreed on the usefulness of ecological sanitation as an effective approach to sustainable sanitation. The workshop issued a set of recommendations and draft country action plans. For details contact Mrs Payden at payden@searo.who.int.

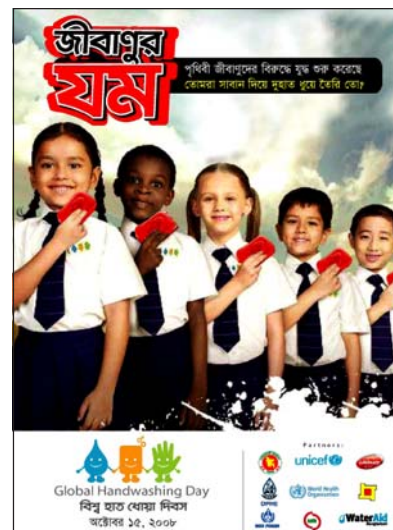
National workshop on occupational health

The WHO India country office, in collaboration with the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), organized a national workshop on occupational health in

Ahmedabad, India from 29 September to 1 October 2008. It reviewed the present occupational health service (OHS) scenario, discussed the WHO global plan of action on worker's health, and examined mechanisms for OHS development and delivery in the Indian context. Attended by high-level officials of the Ministries of Health and Labor, ILO, the ICMR, and representatives of the industry and the Government of Gujarat, the most salient decision was on formulating a new programme on occupational health and safety at MOH, which would bring together aspects of existing health programmes on diseases that have relevance to determinants at the workplace. Greater emphasis would also be placed on OCH training, strengthening the ICMR intern programmes for OCH, and more research in the area. For details mail to: sde@searo.who.int.

Bangladesh celebrates Global Hand-washing Day

Global Hand-washing Day was observed on 22 October 2008, in Bangladesh.



The event was supported by WHO and other development partners, with the aim of raising awareness on the importance of hand-washing with soap at critical times. This most basic of hygiene practices has been shown to reduce substantially the incidence of diarrhoeal disease

and pneumonia, two of the leading causes of death in children under five years of age. The focus of this year's campaign was on school children as agents of change. For details contact *Dr Andrew Trevett* at trevetta@searo.who.int.

EH News

Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety

The sixth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS VI) was held at Dakar, Senegal on 15-18 September 2008. The meeting was attended by over 200 participants, representing 70 governments, 12 intergovernmental organizations and 39 nongovernmental

organizations. The main agenda item for the meeting was the future of the IFCS, resulting in the recommendation for a possible integration of the Forum into the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) as an advisory body. Other important key points discussed were on nanotechnology and nano-materials and their health effects. The need for a precautionary approach to production and use of such materials led to the adoption of a related resolution. Another topic, the substitution of alternatives to hazardous chemicals such

as DDT, called for more ecological management of vectors without the use of DDT. Further highlighted was the practice of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Integrated Vector Management (IVM), which seem to bring benefits of both increased crop output and cost savings for the farmer. For details contact Mr Alexander von Hildebrand at hildebranda@searo.who.int.

Consultation on a Global Research Agenda on Health and Climate Change

A meeting of experts convened by the World Health Organization was held in Madrid, Spain on 6-8 October. The meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Health of Spain. Its aim was to agree on a proposed research agenda for

developing an evidence-based framework for action on the human health implications of climate change. The agenda builds on a comprehensive review of what is already known about health risks from climate change, and was developed by WHO with more than 80 top researchers on climate change and health, and with representatives of donors and other UN agencies. The plan identifies five priority areas of research: direct and indirect health effects of climate change; comparing effectiveness of short-term interventions; assessing health impact of policies of non-health sectors; strengthening public health systems to address health effects of climate change; and interactions with other health determinants and trends. For details contact Mr Alexander von Hildebrand at hildebranda@searo.who.int.

Visits and missions

Public Health Predeployment Course

A Public Health Predeployment course on Emergency and Humanitarian Action was held in Jaipur, India from 14-20 September 2008. Mrs Payden (WSH/SEARO) attended the workshop on 17 September to support the organizers in facilitating the session on public health in emergencies and prioritization in planning for emergencies. In group sessions, EHA focal points shared with participants their knowledge and experiences of emergencies. Provision of safe water, proper disposal of human excreta, disease surveillance and immediate medical help to the injured featured as the very high-priority public health interventions needed in emergencies. For details contact Mrs Payden at payden@searo.who.int.

Training of Trainers (ToT) on occupational health and safety

WHO-NIOH Trainers' Training Programme (ToT) – Advanced Orientation on Occupational Health was held at the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) in Ahmedabad, India on 3 -5 October 2008. The objectives of this training were to orient concerned teaching staff towards occupational health, and to promote occupational health research in medical colleges. For details mail to: sde@searo.who.int.

International Healthy Cities Conference

The International Healthy Cities Conference was held at Zagreb, Croatia on 15-18 October. The conference was organized to celebrate and take stock from 20 years of the European Healthy Cities movement. Organized by the WHO centre for health development (healthy settings office), more than 500 participants attended, including politicians, European city mayors, healthy settings



Healthy City Square, Zagreb.

practitioners, and technical experts in related fields. This meeting marked the celebration of 20 years of the Healthy City movement in Europe. Issues of healthy lifestyles and the climate change agenda dominated the discussions. SEARO presented the SEA Region's case at the keynote sessions on the climate change agenda; a presentation at the parallel session on healthy settings experiences; and as a round table participant on city health and climate change. For details contact Dr A. Sattar Yoosuf at yoosufa@searo.who.int.

Expert workshop on food safety: Better food security through improved food safety

This expert workshop on food safety was held at Colombo, Sri Lanka on 24-25 October 2008. The main agenda of the workshop was to draft a proposal for framing the national food safety policy of Sri Lanka. The workshop was attended by more than 40 national technical experts representing various authorities and bodies responsible for food safety in the country. The workshop came as the culmination of a week of awareness activities on food safety. For details contact Mr Alexander von Hildebrand at hildebranda@searo.who.int.

Farewell



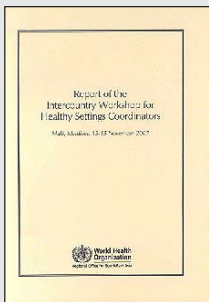
Mr Aaro Samuli Seppanen (Finland) was appointed as Junior Professional Officer in the area of Health and Human Rights in the SDE department in 2006, and completed his assignment on 3 September 2008. During this period he advocated for the advancement of the right to health concept in the WHO SEA countries, and produced good supportive documentation. The SDE team thanks Samuli for his valuable contribution and wishes him success in his future endeavors.



Dr Habibullah Saiyed joined SEARO as Temporary International Professional (TIP) in the area of Occupational and Environmental Health in the SDE department in 2006, and completed his assignment on 18 November 2008. Dr Habibullah provided valuable contribution to promoting advocacy for the reduction of asbestos use in several countries of the Region, and has initiated a valuable process of training district and local level health workers on occupational health services delivery. We wish him well in his future work in the field.

Publications and Learning Materials

Report of the Intercountry Workshop for Healthy Settings Coordinators



The Intercountry Workshop for Healthy Settings Coordinators (Male, Maldives, 13-15 November 2007) was an initiative by WHO / SEAR to create a critical mass of local practitioners for healthy settings programmes. The set of six modules presented in this orientation for healthy settings coordinators covers the following areas: principles of health promotion; understanding the health, environment and development linkage; introduction to the managerial process, including leadership and team-building; practice of good governance; and approaches to resource mobilization. Full report available at the link http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp2008/en/index.html.

Report of the Intercountry workshop for Healthy Settings Coordinators Male, Maldives, 13-15 November 2007.

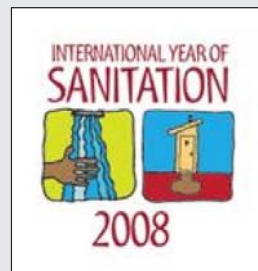
The World Health Report 2008



The Regional Director, Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, inaugurated *The World Health Report 2008* as the regional launch of the publication at SEARO on 23 October 2008. In his address to staff members at the programme, Dr Samlee pointed out that the report commemorates the 30th anniversary of the historic

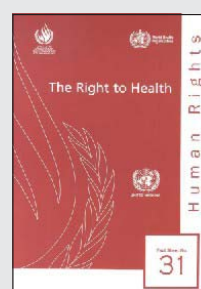
Alma-Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care (PHC). Details available at the link www.who.int/whr/2008/en/.

Joint Monitoring Programme 2008 Report on Water and Sanitation



WHO and UNICEF launched their Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) report, entitled "Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation - Special Focus on Sanitation," which assesses global, regional and country progress using an innovative "ladder" concept for sanitation and drinking water. This shows sanitation and drinking-water practices in greater detail, enabling experts to highlight trends in using improved facilities, shared and unimproved facilities, sources, and tools. Full report available at the link http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp2008/en/index.html.

The Right to Health Fact Sheet No. 31



The Human Rights Fact Sheet series is published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Office at Geneva. The fact sheet aims to shed light on the right to health in international human rights law as it currently stands, amidst the plethora of initiatives and proposals as to what the right to health may or should be. The fact sheet starts by explaining what the right to health is and illustrating its implications for specific individuals and groups, and then elaborates upon States' obligations with respect to the right. It ends with an overview of national, regional and international accountability and monitoring mechanisms. All fact sheets are available at <http://www.ohchr.org>.

Previous issues of Environmental Health Update are available at
http://www.searo.who.int/en/Section23_12688.htm

TIPS for Green Behaviour

Food waste reduction tips: Fridges tend to hide a lot of food—it gets pushed to the back and forgotten until such time that the fridge is cleaned or an awful smell starts emanating from it. Check your fridge weekly and bring foods that will expire soon to the front (in retail this is called stock rotation) to encourage family members to eat it, or use as ingredients in the next meal you cook.

Supermarkets are designed with one thing in mind: to get you buying more than what you originally came in for. Resist impulse buying as the extras you buy will only be tacked onto the list of what you need rather than replacing an item, so the risk is that something will be wasted as a result.

Significant events of the Quarter

1. The Third Global Conference of the Alliance for Healthy Cities in Ichikawa, Japan, 23-26 October 2008 (Details available at www.city.ichikawa.chiba.jp/afhc2008/english/)
2. World Toilet Summit 2008, 4-6 November 2008, Macao, China (Details available at <http://www.worldtoiletevents.com/>)
3. Regional Workshop on Ecological Sanitation (22-25 September 2008), Kathmandu, Nepal. For details contact Mrs Payden at Payden@searo.who.int.
4. 5th Asian Food and Nutrition Safety Conference: Science-based Solutions- Sustainable Actions in Cebu, Philippines, 5-7 November 2008. For details contact Dr Abikusno Nugroho at abikusnon@searo.who.int.

SDE Focal Points

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DPR Korea: Acting WHO Representative, Dr S. Puri (puris@whodprk.org)

India: Mr A.K. Sengupta, NPO-Environment, WHO India (senguptaak@searo.who.int)

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