

THE HEALTH AGENDA

Commonwealth countries have long recognised that many of the issues of most importance to the health of their people are affected by factors such as finance, development, employment, housing and public utilities. Many Secretariat activities therefore take into account health concerns when designing and implementing programmes.



Developing the management of health

The Secretariat also focuses on promoting technical co-operation which matches health resources to health needs, particularly in the priority areas of child survival, AIDS and other communicable diseases, human resource development for environment and health, and the reduction of drug abuse. Work on reducing drug abuse recognises links with a wide range of adverse health consequences, including the transmission of viruses, such as HIV and Hepatitis B, and complements legal work on illicit trafficking which is described elsewhere in this Report.

Wherever possible, the Secretariat collaborates with other international agencies and NGOs to ensure the most effective use of limited resources and to avoid duplication.

AIDS

From the mid-1980s, the Commonwealth has been involved in specific aspects of the management and control of HIV/AIDS, initially in Africa. A process of monitoring the development of national

multisectoral AIDS programmes annually has been instituted, at the request of Heads of Government, using information from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and member countries.

Effective approaches to community-based management and control of AIDS, developed in East, Central and Southern Africa, have been shared with other regions—notably Asia and the Caribbean—in collaboration with local NGOs. In the Caribbean, the development of an approach to community-based management of HIV/AIDS for a low-prevalence area started with a workshop in Jamaica in May 1994. In Asia, the Secretariat has collaborated with the Salvation Army in Bombay, India, where work has focused on the promotion of home care and training of health workers.

In 1994, the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Government of Kenya, organised a workshop on women who cope with HIV/AIDS. Participants from Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanzania and Uganda included women who were HIV-positive, or were carers, health workers, policy-makers and health service managers. Models for successful coping at individual, family, community and national levels were developed.

The Secretariat has also undertaken an inventory and evaluation of existing education and training materials on AIDS in the Caribbean to assess gender content and develop a model framework on development of gender-sensitive educational and training materials for use at national level. This model is now being used for the development of a training video for the Caribbean.

The Africa Centre of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) has set up a regional network of HIV-positive young people who visited similarly affected young people in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia. A regional newsletter has been started to facilitate networking among young people living with the virus and

those at risk, and national networks have been established in Ghana, Uganda and Zambia.

A publication, *HIV/AIDS Education for Out-of-School Youth*, has been developed in collaboration with Unicef and two 20-page comic books on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, for use as resource and training materials, have been produced – one in English, the other in French, for the South Pacific Francophone countries.

Child Survival

At the Cyprus CHOGM, Heads of Government asked Ministers of Health to monitor Commonwealth progress towards the achievement of mid-decade goals set out in Unicef's Plan of Action of the 1990 World Summit for Children. These had been outlined in a memorandum, *Children of the Commonwealth*, and presented to CHOGM. While Unicef provided data on progress in all countries, the Secretariat sent a brief questionnaire to member countries with particular interest in the potential for sharing information and expertise within the Commonwealth.

The book of government-NGO collaboration to sustain the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) in the context of primary health care has been the focus of a series of regional expert group meetings arranged by the Secretariat in collaboration with the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA). Following the Asian expert group meeting, a project to promote government-NGO collaboration for primary health care, including the expanded programme of immunisation, has been developed in collaboration with the CPHA. The report on the African regional expert group meet-



Child immunisation in Sierra Leone

ing outlines the regional priorities, constraints and opportunities and emphasises the importance of integrated primary health care. A proposal for communicable disease surveillance in East, Central and Southern Africa is being followed up. The last in the series of regional expert group meetings took place in the Pacific in mid-1995 to address priorities for child health in the Pacific in conjunction with the NGO, Children's Research International.

Networking child health specialists and training of appropriate health workers will be a particular focus for Child Health in the Pacific-International (CHIP-IN), an NGO formed during a meeting on child survival held in New Zealand in 1994.

Reduction of Drug Abuse

The Secretariat has continued community-level activities designed to deal with the increasingly high priority area of reducing drug demand. In the programme in Asia, expert group meetings, combined with specialist training, were held in April and August 1994, and in January 1995, at the Drug Research Centre at the University of Science Malaysia, and in April 1995 in Sri Lanka. Apart from the collection, review and interpretation of data, assistance has been given to conduct small-scale studies in participating countries. The development of national city-based surveillance networks is being encouraged and assisted, with a view to promoting sustainability. Caricom efforts to set up a surveillance system in the Caribbean are also being supported.

In recognition of the importance of creating active partnerships between government, NGOs and the private sector, a specialised training course in drug demand-reduction was conducted on a regional basis at the CYP Africa Centre in Zambia in June 1995.

Human Resource Development for Health

The Commonwealth Health Development Programme (CHDP) is an important Secretariat tool for human

resource development in priority areas in health. It emphasises technical co-operation which matches health resources to health needs through the exchange of skilled health workers, institutional linkages, training opportunities and the development of cadres of key health workers.

Collaborative regional activities include the development of health systems research as a management tool in the Caribbean in collaboration with Britain's ODA, St Thomas' Hospital and the University of the West Indies (UWI) and its application to the training of community groups. The first regional short course in health systems research, for senior and middle management in the health ministries and health services, took place at UWI as a pilot project in mid-1994. It is proposed to expand the programme to enable other countries in the region to benefit from the training.

In collaboration with the International Red Cross and WHO/Global Programme on AIDS, and Global Blood Safety Initiative, the Secretariat has continued to support training in blood and blood product safety management in East, Central and Southern Africa. Harare, Zimbabwe, is the regional centre for development of safe transfusion services.

Plans for distance training in the management of drug supplies in the Commonwealth have progressed with the completion of all but one of the nine modules envisaged for the management of pharmaceutical stores. The Secretariat, Commonwealth Pharmaceutical Association, Commonwealth of Learning, Britain's ODA and other agencies have contributed to the development of these modules with the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Britain. This year, the Secretariat will collaborate with other agencies in extending the training of pharmacists using this material in the West Africa region.

The Commonwealth Action Plan on Nursing/Midwifery has continued to work with regional initiatives to enhance the involvement of nursing/midwifery in the development and implementation of national health policy. The responses to a questionnaire, sent to countries in 1994, have been

analysed and regional priorities identified. Regional activities have taken place with some assistance from the Secretariat.

Long-term appointments of experts in the health field include a Consultant/Professor in anaesthesia at the Ghana medical school, a chief medical officer in Grenada and a chief physician at a hospital in Tonga. Training activities have included a regional workshop for curriculum development for the training of trainers in resource management, which included senior nurses from East, Central



Child survival and primary health care are of great concern to the Commonwealth

and Southern Africa, a staff development training programme at Mbarara University, Uganda, a one-year award for specialised training in Britain in foetal tissue techniques relevant to the management of sickle cell disease, and support for a regional training programme run by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development.

In its efforts to provide essential data and information to member governments to assist them in planning and implementation of health pro-

grammes and services for young people a research project was organised by the CYP. After visits to the British Virgin Islands, Kiribati, Maldives and Namibia, an in-depth analysis of the health status of young people in these countries, a policy document and training materials for young people associated with health programmes were produced.

Environment and Health

Environmental health impact assessment (EHIA) manuals, developed in collaboration with Australia, have been piloted in Tonga and Solomon Islands. At the same time as the Australian team was developing the draft training materials, it became clear, through consultation with WHO and other experts, that health impact assessment

(HIA), as an integral part of environmental impact assessment (EIA), was being addressed in a number of places. Accordingly, the Secretariat arranged for a small expert group to meet in Aberdeen, hosted by the Centre for Environmental Management and Planning (CEMP), to identify core HIA in EIA material and develop proposals for training applications of the core material. The framework developed by the group is being used in Asia and the Pacific for the preparation of training materials.

In Africa, a regional survey of urban sanitation led to a pilot project for developing an integrated strategic plan in Zambia. A report describing the process is being prepared for distribution in the region. WHO joined the pilot project in 1994.

EMPOWERING YOUTH

Young people represent a third or more of the population in many countries and this proportion is expected to increase. Meeting the needs of this distinct population group has major implications for the futures of their countries and the Commonwealth believes that efforts towards social and economic growth should be coupled with strategic policies which address their special problems.

At their second meeting in May 1995 at Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Youth Affairs underscored this belief by approving a three-pronged strategy for action in youth empowerment, development of youth policy and the promotion of activities to help youth achieve their full potential as a separate, and at the same time integrated, human resource. Empowerment would involve equity, access to resources to achieve that equity, and participation in policy formulation and decision-making.

In the past two years, Secretariat activities in

youth affairs, delivered through the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), have been directed at supporting national efforts to develop appropriate strategies for priority issues such as enterprise and youth employment, young women and development, youth health and welfare, environment and literacy. These activities are delivered at pan-Commonwealth level and through the CYP's Regional Centres in Africa (Lusaka, Zambia), Asia (Chandigarh, India), the Caribbean (Georgetown, Guyana) and the South Pacific (Honiara, Solomon Islands).

Training and Related Activities

A 1993 review of the CYP's popular diploma and certificate courses for youth workers recommended the use of distance training as a major means of delivering training in order to meet growing demand within the CYP's limited resources.

The CYP's Caribbean Centre has already used distance education as the main mode of delivering its