



FORWARD TOGETHER
Appropriate Technology for Health

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The health bill of the industrialized nations, with less than 30 per cent of the world's population, is already over 300 thousand million dollars each year. All countries have a right to expect at least the same level of health, but many of them can hardly shoulder such an immense financial burden. Moreover, there is no direct relationship between the amount of money spent on conventional medical care and the overall health of the people. A totally new approach is therefore needed.

One of the most fundamental of WHO's activities in partnership with the developing countries is its programme on primary health care and rural development. Yet attempts to bring health care and protection against disease to the remoter and least well served areas of the Third World are constantly handicapped by the absence of simplified, low-cost materials, methods and techniques designed for or adapted to local conditions.

In the past it was too easily assumed that technology imported from the industrialized countries would automatically solve the developing nations' problems, including those of health. This led to the wholesale adoption of costly and inappropriate methods and techni-

ques which benefit only a few people and contribute little to the widely dispersed communities of rural farming societies. Money that might have been better spent has been squandered on such efforts and, in the process, the developing health services have become unduly dependent on the advanced industry of the developed world. Indeed many industrialized countries are now beginning to reassess the appropriateness of their own technologies.

The right tools for the job

A resolution adopted by WHO's Member States at the World Health Assembly in May 1976 stressed that primary health care and health technology must go hand in hand. As a direct result, WHO has now embarked on a new programme entitled "Appropriate Technology for Health." Its objective is to help national governments solve the problems encountered in primary health care programmes (particularly those problems aggravated by the lack of an appropriate technology), at the same time both reducing the current dependence on imported technology and increasing the effectiveness of national health services.

Why "appropriate" technology? Because the kind of technology the programme is searching for must be right not only for the particular prob-



lem but also for each individual country's situation. It must be scientifically sound and operationally effective — in some cases advanced scientific skills will be necessary for its initial development. But it must also be acceptable both to the decision-makers and to the communities it serves; it must be tailored to the existing local financial, technical and manpower resources, and it must recognise local cultural constraints.

The targets

Drawing on skills, knowledge and creativity from many disciplines, the programme will concentrate on health care problems which a suitable technology might help to solve. Sometimes an effective solution already exists, but is either little known or unacceptable; or it has been found, but needs to be improved. When there is no known solution, a new technique has to be sought out and tested.

The search will focus both on methods and materials — equipment, tools, devices, chemicals, drugs, biological substances — and on how to use them to best effect. But this is only part of the story. The technical difficulties confronting a health project are often aggravated by operational, financial or cultural constraints. So the WHO programme will also deal with ways of encouraging people to accept new technologies, training staff for their use and maintenance, and the proper production, distribution and application of instruments and materials in the countries where they are needed.

The simple medical kit provides all the basic needs of this rural midwife.
(Photo WHO/P. Almasy)

The year 1978 was marked for planning. A major activity was the development of a plan for the next six years (1978-1983). Appropriate technologies for different countries and other UN agencies were actively involved. A major health research and action group was set up by Dr Katherine B. Fox of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, working closely

What we mean

Some examples

Household treatment of diarrhoea by oral rehydration

Ways of ensuring the use of vaccine.

Simple, reliable methods of sterilizing medical equipment.

Simple and reliable methods of treating anaemia at village level.

A cheap effective method of health communication.

Further steps will be taken in co-operation with the countries to build up a list of health problems; to make a selection of appropriate technologies which could be applied; and to draw up plans for institutions, group activities throughout the country. Interest in appropriate technology in the health sector will be a major theme. Information on appropriate technologies will be made available to those whose work involves, namely those who are concerned with problems in the

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Once a list of priority needs has been worked out, research and development contracts will be negotiated with appropriate technology groups in various parts of the world. The intention is to begin work as soon as possible on some of the technological problems already identified and to start field trials in one or two countries. In all these activities, WHO is assuming a coordinating role.

Challenge for the future

A great deal is already happening all over the world today in the field of appropriate technology. Those activities which are potentially of value to the health sector need to be identified and coordinated. The success of the new programme will depend on the readiness of countries to commit themselves to its aims and challenges. Many still have to be convinced that locally produced, low-cost, simple technologies are not automatically second-rate. In fact to develop appropriate technologies in the developing world calls for much more ingenuity than is generally believed. Health professionals in all countries must be prepared to modify present conventional attitudes and accept alternative ways as well as some traditional practices of proven value.

Because the new programme reaches beyond the usual boundaries of the health sector, it has been planned from the start as a collaborative effort with all those agencies, institutions and individuals concerned in the development of national resources.

It provides an unprecedented opportunity for the developed and developing world to work in partnership for the benefit of all.



Primitive — but it works. Weighing scales like this, made from a stick, a little string, some leaves and balls of clay, can help mothers to ensure a "balanced" diet for their families.

A two-man pedal-driven pump, constructed from locally available materials, raises water from below the surface to where it can be diverted into irrigation channels.
(Photos WHO/UNICEF)



We need your ideas

Essential to WHO's new programme "Appropriate Technology for Health" will be a free flow of information and "feedback" about innovations and traditional methods that have already worked, about practical experiences in all parts of the world, and about potential needs that have to be met. Our own sources may not be enough and we welcome any information from our readers, especially if it appears to have a direct application to health problems.

We need your help...

... to put these ideas into practice. In many countries, official agencies, institutions and individuals are already facing the problems of developing locally applicable technologies, and it will be WHO's task to help them in their work. But we need to know much more about people and institutions anywhere in the world who have the interest and capacity to help in this coordinated programme.

We need funds

Developing and applying simplified technology where it is urgently required will cost money. Donations and gifts in kind can be put to immediate use and may be sent to: Voluntary Fund for Health Promotion (Appropriate Technology for Health), the World Health Organization, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland.



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The medicinal value of local herbs is being scientifically evaluated in many countries today.

(Photo WHO/Novosti)

A migraine sufferer having treatment by acupuncture — a technology requiring great skill but a minimum of materials.

(Photo WHO/Interfoto)







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