

Health for All by the Year 2000

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Recently (May 1985), 146 of the member states of the World Health Organisation (WHO) have evaluated their strategies for health for all by the year 2000. Several ministries were invited besides the Ministry of Health to the meeting in Geneva. The task was tremendous, therefore participation was needed by all those who are closely or remotely related to the improvement of the health of the general populace.

Reading through the detailed report, one is amazed to learn of some of the changes that have occurred in the developing countries from 1978-1984. I will cite only a few :

The infant mortality has decreased generally but parasitic infection is still flourishing. Added to that is the problem of rapidly increasing chronic and non-communicable diseases associated with ageing, affluent life styles and behaviour.

Malnutrition is the most important condition affecting some 100 million children under the age of 5 years in developing countries.

Approximately 500,000 women die each year from pregnancy-related causes, most of which are preventable. The majority of these cases are in the developing countries.

Diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections continue to flourish, while tuberculosis still remains a major health problem.

The habit of smoking cigarettes is now spreading rapidly in developing countries while it is diminishing in some developed countries. Even alcohol consumption is on the increase in the developing countries.

Globally, about 1,000 million people have no access to safe water and 1,500 million or more are in need of basic sanitation services. Many countries have noted slow progress or inability to sustain momentum in their attempts to reach the goals of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade 1981-1990.

In the period 1978-1984, there was a great change in the world's economic and political circumstances which made itself very evident by the effect of poverty in the developing world. The living conditions of, and opportunities available to the vulnerable population groups such as refugees, unemployed youth, disadvantaged women, the elderly, the oppressed and the disabled have in fact worsened.

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For the poorest countries of the world, the goal of Health for All by the Year 2000 will remain a dream which can hardly be fulfilled with the present economic and political situation unless new resources are discovered or substantial help is channelled to these countries. Finally, it is interesting to note that 6 weeks military expenditure can feed the whole world for one year. If the wealthy society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich !

REFERENCE :

WHO features. May 1986; 101:1-4.