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Guidelines for Human Resources Planning in Environmental and Occupational Health

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Preface

The lack of human resources is a major impediment to progress in dealing with environmental and occupational health hazards around the world, especially in newly industrialized and developing countries. The need for comprehensive national strategies to promote sustainable development* (1), including necessary human resources, was highlighted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in 1992. Agenda 21, the Conference's blueprint for action, calls on each country "to develop the knowledge and practical skills to foresee and identify environmental hazards, and the capacity to reduce risks" (2).

But how should this be done? Although national planning to ensure a sufficient quantity of primary health care personnel has been practised for many years, it did not focus on the specific skills and expertise required for the management of environmental and occupational health. In the context of follow-up to the Conference, WHO initiated a project in 1994 to support countries in developing national human resources development plans in environmental and occupational health. The goal was to promote the implementation of systematic, priority-based planning for the production of the human resources needed in the field, while maximizing the use of scarce national resources.

The project aimed to develop and test an approach to such planning in three countries — Cuba, Mexico and South Africa — and, subsequently, to offer guidelines to other countries. A collaborative effort, the project was primarily sponsored by the WHO's Office of Global and Integrated Environmental Health and Office of Occupational Health and by the United Nations Environment Programme. In addition, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, United States, supported the field activities in Mexico and South Africa.

This document describes the lessons learned from the country experiences of the project and provides general guidelines to facilitate the implementation of a planning initiative for human resources development in environmental and occupational health. There is, of course, no standard recipe. Countries are encouraged to utilize this resource and the suggested references to create their own menu for a sustainable workforce in environment and health.

We gratefully acknowledge the help received from Dr Thomas Hall, author of the WHO document *Human resources for health: a toolkit for planning, training and management* (3), in developing the planning strategy. His toolkit, consultation and reviews provided ongoing guidance for the project and for the preparation of this document.

Dr Orvill Adams and Dr Alexander Goubarev from the Division of Organization and Management of Health Systems, WHO, are thanked for their general support of the project and thoughtful inputs to this document.

* "Sustainable development" is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The work of Drs D.L. Pisaniello (University of Adelaide, South Australia), A.J. McMichael (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) and A. Woodward (Wellington Clinical School, New Zealand), who prepared a preliminary draft of a guidelines document on national training plans, is acknowledged with gratitude.

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Executive summary

Human resources development in environmental and occupational health has been a priority of WHO for many years. Specific initiatives in human resources development have included education and training programmes for government officials on topics such as drinking water supply and sanitation technologies, hazardous waste management, environmental epidemiology and chemical safety, as well as the development of educational materials and reference texts. With the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, came a new orientation towards national planning aimed at guaranteeing the necessary capacity to identify, manage and prevent environmental problems and to promote sustainable development.

In this context, WHO began to focus on more comprehensive approaches to capacity-building, which could include the development of institutional infrastructure, a legal framework, enforcement mechanisms and the necessary human resources. Examples of such approaches are a project to help countries incorporate initiatives on health and the environment into their development planning, the production of national profiles on the sound management of chemicals, and the promotion of national planning for human resources development in environmental and occupational health. The latter approach is the subject of this document.

This document describes a methodology for planning of human resources development in environmental and occupational health which was field-tested in Cuba, Mexico and South Africa between 1994 and 1996. In addition to outlining the rationale for such planning and the recommended steps in the planning process, the country case studies are discussed in detail with a focus on the ingredients for successful implementation in future.

Chapter 1 highlights the incentives for developing a national human resources development plan which includes the documentation of existing personnel and training opportunities, and creation of a mechanism for producing and maintaining the necessary skills and expertise for environmental and occupational health management. Human resources development plans also provide a framework for funding proposals to support national capacity-building. Environmental and occupational human resources development are linked since the same general knowledge and expertise are required to assess and control hazards in both environments. The training of personnel and the services they ultimately provide must be coordinated in order to ensure that problems are not simply transferred from the workplace to the general environment and vice versa.

Chapter 2 defines human resources development planning as an approach to determine how best to produce, deploy and use human resources in the right numbers, with the right skills, attitudes and motivation and at the right cost to perform environmental/occupational health functions. It provides a brief introduction to different strategies for workforce planning, or for defining the number and type of personnel needed, on the basis of their functions, required

knowledge and competencies, or job category. Details on how to implement each of these strategies can be found in the annotated references.

Chapter 3 describes the steps in human resources planning which may in some countries be combined or carried out in a different order, depending on national or subnational needs and priorities. Although there is no standard formula, most approaches include: identifying partners in health, environment, labour, education and other sectors who have a stake in human resources development in environmental and occupational health; establishing a working group to guide the planning process; assessing existing human resources development resources, services and unmet needs; holding national forums or workshops on the issue; preparing a draft plan; reviewing, ratifying and implementing the plan; and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Highlights of this chapter include guidelines on what to include in a country review and training institution survey.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on country experiences in implementing the human resources development planning process and on the lessons learned. Sample interview and survey formats developed by the project countries are included in the appendices. Problems common to all project countries included a fragmented legislative framework, inadequate training programmes (in terms of content, methodology, access, preparation of teachers, etc.) lack of intersectoral cooperation and insufficient planning.

While the planning process was advanced in all countries, some of the important lessons learned are summarized below.

Human resources development planning:

- is time-consuming, not a “one-shot deal”, and, therefore, must be integrated into ongoing development planning;
- requires a clear mandate for multisectoral involvement from high-level government authorities;
- requires the participation of high-level decision-makers from all sectors involved in the planning process;
- requires training in human resources development planning for those leading and participating in the planning process;
- requires a review of human resources development which is adequately

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