

REPORTS OF RECENT MEETINGS

Special Health Problems of Island Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged Countries

Paper prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat

At their Lusaka Meeting in 1979 Commonwealth Heads of Government emphasised that attention needed to be given to the special problems faced by countries whose small size, isolation and scarce resources severely limited their capacity to achieve their development objectives. The Meeting requested the Commonwealth Secretary-General to pursue a programme of action which will enable the Commonwealth to respond both multilaterally and bilaterally to the special needs of these small countries.

2. The Secretariat accordingly convened a meeting of experts in January 1980 to examine the special health problems of such countries and to make recommendations on the special measures required for dealing with them.

3. The group of experts recognised that no single formula for action could be worked out which would be applicable to all countries; and they recognised that the final details of the initiatives to be taken would necessarily vary according to the geography, special needs and local resources of individual countries. They noted however that, diverse as the national backgrounds might be, there were certain common patterns of need and of approach.

4. The recommendations of the meeting centred largely on these common areas, which included health manpower planning, travel and communication, demographic and health data, natural disasters and other emergencies, strengthening national and regional institutions, and regional collaboration and organisation.

5. The report of the expert group has been circulated to member governments. Commonwealth representatives at their meeting in Geneva in May 1980, prior to the Thirty-third World Health Assembly, endorsed the main conclusions contained in the report and agreed that the recommendations of the expert group should be given further consideration by the Sixth Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting in Arusha.

COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT ACTION

6. Besides giving attention to the conclusions in general, Health Ministers may wish to endorse the proposal of the Commonwealth Secretariat that its action in relation to the recommendations of the expert group should be directed to the following priority areas:

Health manpower preparation

- (a) Strengthening the planning and training capabilities of health ministries by the provision of consultants and training fellowships.

- (b) Supporting national or regional training courses and seminars.

Travel and communication

- (c) In view of their pivotal importance for national health development and for regional health collaboration, problems of travel and communication might be made a subject of particular study. In this respect the possibility of using radio and television communication by satellite might be specially investigated.
- (d) Roles for other donor agencies might be identified and advice provided on how best their assistance might be obtained.

Demographic and health data

- (e) Assistance with setting up or improving national and regional health information systems.

Strengthening national and regional institutions

- (f) Assisting such institutions to expand their capacity to become more effective focal centres for regional planning and action.
- (g) This could include assistance with promoting and strengthening collaboration between national and regional teaching and donor institutions. The Secretariat might use its special knowledge of, and its relationships with, international health aid agencies to help in this regard.
- (h) It could also include providing specific technical assistance as need is identified.

Regional health collaboration

- (i) Identifying, strengthening and extending opportunities for regional collaboration in the health field.