

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE HEALTH SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

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The world is in transition-actually in a great hurry to move on, Recent developments have made people and machines move faster than ever before; values are shifting. With the rapid changes in political, socio-economic and environmental scenarios unfolding right before our blurry eyes, a clear vision for the future becomes all the more necessary, however difficult the task may be.

The 21st Century will see many more remarkable breakthroughs in science and technologies, bringing the World closer in one way and making it more disparate in another. The development field itself will be riddled with conflicts, Will techno-friendly advances also be eco-friendly? Will economic reforms also benefit the economically depressed? Will the balance between materialistic and spiritual values tilt in favour of the former or latter? Such balances, in our opinion, will be influenced by many forces. For example greed for money or power will be balanced by the compulsions for equity, waste by conservation and violence by peace. Health too, will hang in the balance - delicately positioned between the haves and have-nots, between abundance and want, between access and deprivation. Which way the balance will tilt will depend on the way we want it to tilt. In the vision that I have of the future

- I see ethics prevailing, to ensure health as a fundamental right of every citizen of the world, regardless of race, colour, economic or social status. The near-impossible survival conditions for a significant proportion of the world's population in deprived pockets of developing countries must begin to touch the conscience of the rich.

- I see people as central to this movement. A growing disenchantment with political systems riddled with nepotism and corruption has already begun. Enlightenment will grow, literacy levels will improve and communication highways will increasingly help in exposing the 'games' being played internationally and nationally by small elitist groups that aim to preserve, even widen present-day disparities. Government structures developed over the last half a century will not change easily. In fact, as the population grows, as people begin to understand how the determinants of health can be controlled; as men and women more closely see the strong relationship between health and quality of life, responsibility for health will move from the centralized health sectors more peripherally towards the community. Through nongovernmental organizations, the media and community based groups, people's voices will be heard. Their demands will be expressed loudly and more boldly. Collective expression will encourage collective leadership and, action. Coalition and collaboration will, hopefully, replace confrontation.

- As far as the rich, the privileged, the well-endowed are concerned, humanitarian concerns will surface for a variety of reasons. This will lead to more tolerance, more concern for poor neighbours and friends and more generosity being extended for the promotion of equity.

- Harsh realities will shake complacency. Communicable diseases have never respected national boundaries. Their movements across the globe are even faster today. They have also shown a healthy disrespect for class,

or country. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a stern warning to all those who believed that this disease is somebody else's problem, not theirs.

- The role of the government health sector in meeting the new situations arising out of enlightenment and conscientiousness will also become more relevant. Health structures as such may not change significantly but strategies and approaches will. This will help to bring health closer to the people through greater decentralization, viable district health systems and, most importantly, a willingness and motivation to work with other than the health sector to create supportive conditions for health.

- With growing realization of the importance of health for long-term development gains, planners and policy makers will begin to see the wisdom of placing health high on the political agenda. Development sectors will increasingly appreciate the relationship between health and development.

- The people's perspective to development will be recognized, For people, it does not matter who provides them what they need. What matters is that they get what is required to live a life of dignity and that their basic needs are met at a price they can afford. They will demand opportunities for growth and upward mobility to improve the quality of their lives. Alliances will be built between various partners, providers and receivers

In the vision of the future I also see:

- health partnerships forming, growing and maturing as strong holds for health action
- government and people appreciating the powerful contribution that health can make to social cohesion and quality of life,
- government protecting at all costs and the underserved and poor and providing, a high quality of health care, rationalizing high technology applications, opening up health issues for national and international debate
- parliamentarians, community leaders, religious groups, environmental forums and other opinion leaders making health an important part of their mission and work various UN agencies and world bodies working more closely together- for health concerns with a solidarity of purpose
- various UN agencies and world bodies working more closely for health concerns
- the private sector and nongovernmental organizations joining hands with government and with the people in the pursuit of common goals;

These are glimpses of a vision for future health: (i) framed by the values I hold most dear - *solidarity, cohesion, harmony* and *peace*. (ii) inspired by the binding power partnerships hold for health; (iii) sparked by the dedication and commitment shown by member countries in their pursuit for health for all; (iv) created by a strong and growing conviction that as we enter the 21st century, partnerships for health could well become the turning point for health development in the South-East Asia Region.

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