

3 WHO's Mandate in Emergencies

WHO's Constitution specifically mandates the Organization in the field of humanitarian assistance in emergencies *"to act as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work", "to furnish appropriate technical assistance and, in emergencies, necessary aid upon the request or acceptance of governments."* WHO is also mandated *"to provide, or assist in providing, upon the request of the United Nations, health services and facilities to special groups, such as the people of the trust territories."*

The Organization has also long been designated as the lead agency within the UN system for health-related aspects of emergencies, and should advise the other partners on coordination in this field. This health coordination role, as distinguished from operational support, makes WHO a key partner of DHA, and of other emergency-oriented agencies represented on the IASC. It must be strengthened and developed.

In emergency preparedness, WHO's goal is to strengthen national preparedness capabilities through capacity-building at the national level and by ensuring maximum congruence between emergency relief, rehabilitation and long-term development efforts. The net effect should be to promote increased self-reliance in the affected countries.

Throughout its emergency relief and humanitarian action operations, WHO's objectives are to provide, to the best of its abilities, initial relief assistance in the aftermath of man-made and natural

disasters; to ensure that health relief efforts are efficient, relevant and carried out in a coordinated fashion; and subsequently to support and help to rehabilitate health care systems, emphasizing the primary health care approach as well as the need to provide special groups with the health services and facilities they need. A primary focus of WHO's efforts in relief is to ensure that, wherever possible, previous health relief structures are built on with a view to strengthening the affected countries' general health infrastructure in the months and years to come. ■

The Assembly's Endorsement

Resolution WHA46.6 passed by the World Health Assembly in May 1993 urged Member States to strengthen their capabilities for preparing for, preventing and mitigating disasters, and to increase their budget allocations for this purpose. It also urged further improvements in related staffing and technical capacities at WHO headquarters and stronger regional mechanisms for efficient health management in emergencies. WHO Representatives and field staff should receive adequate training and instruction to fulfil their tasks. The Organization itself should be better prepared to give early warning of disasters in general, and disease epidemics in particular, to complement the UN's own early warning mechanisms.

A New Focus for WHO's Emergency Action

Much more than in the past, WHO now intends to take the initiative in emergency situations where its technical skills in the health field can usefully be brought to bear. The new focus is on ensuring a better response in complex emergencies. Part of this task will consist of gathering and disseminating information, responding to emergency health needs and problems, restoring and maintaining health services, and making sure that other partners are aware of the new WHO potential.

In the past, apart from its familiar and longstanding Emergency Preparedness programme, WHO's involvement in emergency management chiefly took the form of response to specific individual emergencies in what were considered to be high-priority areas for WHO's attention, such as Mozambique, Namibia, the Occupied Arab Territories, the Gulf and Somalia. WHO's former Emergency Relief Operations Division was never in a position, whether financially or in terms of staff, to undertake all the vital technical functions that are indispensable factors in the field of health emergency relief.

WHO's involvement in humanitarian action is relatively recent in a field already overcrowded by many other agencies. Given that the health issues of major emergency situations were addressed by so many other partners who filled the gap during the "inactive period" of WHO in this area, there is now a need for WHO to re-direct its strategy on the basis of scientific and normative functions and technical expertise. So it is essential that WHO's Member States, UN agencies and NGOs operating in the health field, as well as donors, should be fully informed and that they endorse WHO's more active role in emer-

gencies. And if WHO is to have its credibility and acceptance by others fully restored in this particular area, it is no less essential that the Organization makes sure that it can indeed deliver the goods.

It was to address this issue that the revised mandate of the **Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action (EHA)** was proposed by a task force expressly set up in August 1993 to recommend to the Director-General and the Management Development Committee just how the Organization could best adapt to the requirements of fast-evolving emergency situations

The task force envisaged two distinct areas of activities:

- (i) humanitarian action, including operational coordination and emergency support services;
- (ii) emergency preparedness and national capacity building.

With regard to humanitarian action, the division neither intends nor is it structured to carry out most field activities by itself or through its own resources. Rather, it sees itself as the planner, coordinator and evaluator of relief efforts, all such tasks to be undertaken in close collaboration with all other parts of WHO. In line with this strategy, EHA has stepped up its partnerships with WHO technical programmes. At the same time, regional and country offices are correspondingly taking on an increasing share of responsibility in the field.

In complex emergencies, however, an important coordinating role remains for WHO headquarters. Complex emergencies require a UN system-wide response under the leadership of the Secretary-General and DHA. The official role of WHO in the complex process managed through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is discharged by headquarters, since no individual regional office is accountable for the whole range of responsibilities in emergency management. While carried in full and close cooperation with field and regional offices, fund-raising, approval of programme planning, project monitoring and evaluation, financial and substantive reporting, and official communications with donors remain part of the functions of headquarters. ■

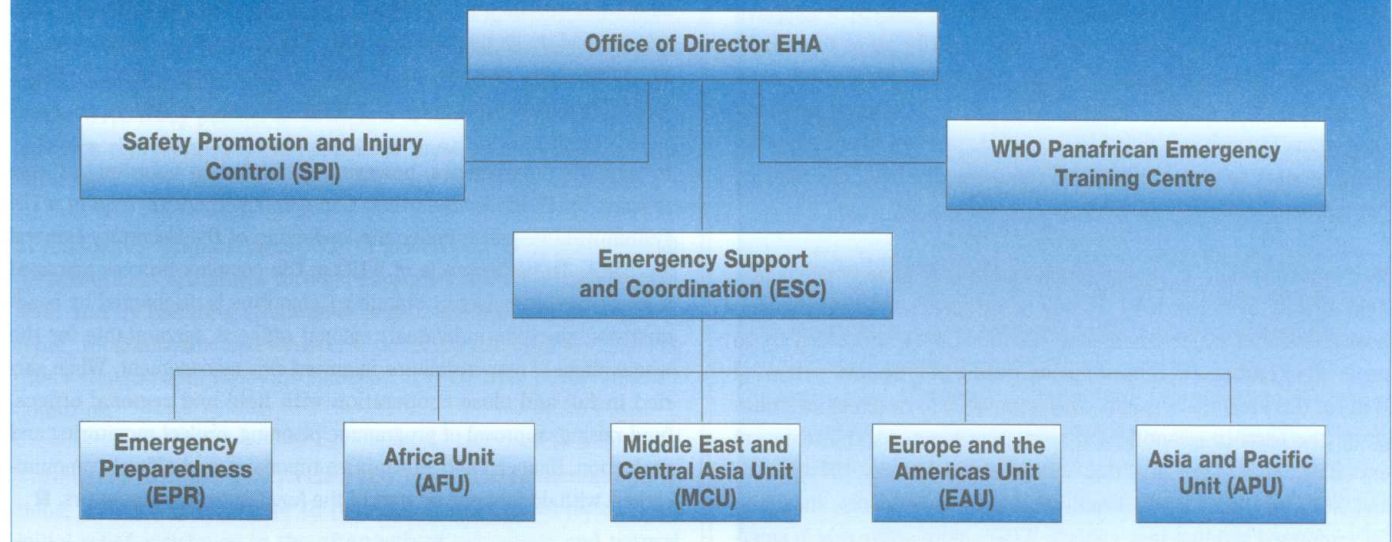
5 WHO's Role and Responsibilities

Under normal circumstances, countries vulnerable to major emergencies and disasters should be encouraged by WHO to allocate regular resources (including WHO budget funds) towards strengthening their emergency management capacities at national and sub-national levels. WHO in turn should ensure that it has the managerial and technical capability to provide technical support to Member States in building up their national emergency and response programmes.

After an emergency has been officially declared, the nature of WHO's involvement will depend on the scale of the emergency. In small-scale emergencies - for instance, a natural disaster of limited intensity or an epidemic - WHO, through the national and regional office concerned, would assist the affected country in emergency management and in evaluating interventions for "lessons learned" in order to further strengthen the national and sub-national emergency preparedness programme.

In major or complex emergencies which are beyond the coping capacity of the affected country, WHO should extend full assistance to respond to the health effects caused by the disaster. In complex emergencies where no national authority is left to manage needed services, WHO should - within the framework of UN coordinated humanitarian assistance - take full responsibility for directly planning, coordinating and putting into effect all necessary health-related humanitarian assistance. ■

Structure of the Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action (EHA)



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Emergency Preparedness

Defining Emergency Preparedness

***Emergency Preparedness:** a programme of long-term development activities whose goals are to strengthen the overall capacity and capability of a country to manage efficiently all types of emergency, and bring about an orderly transition from relief through rehabilitation, and back to sustained development.*

Emergency preparedness aims to build up the national capacities of Member States that are vulnerable to emergencies and disasters of all kinds to handle their impact. It is of a developmental nature and therefore should follow normal WHO procedures. In fact, national emergency preparedness is an essential part of the work of WHO at country and regional levels, and comprises five elements, all aimed at strengthening capacity and capability in the health sector response:

- the development of national legislation and national policy for emergency management (including emergency and disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness as well as response, recovery and rehabilitation);

- the development of plans and procedures for emergency management and the coordination of emergency activities at national and sub-national levels;
- the development of institutional and human resources for emergency management;
- the development of programmes for public awareness, public education and community participation in emergency management;
- the collection, analysis and dissemination of information related to emergencies and disasters.

In this context, **the WHO representative's role** is:

- to promote the setting up of an emergency preparedness country programme and to encourage the health sector to play a full role;
- to encourage the integration of the programme in the country's long-term social and economic development plans;
- to promote the development of the necessary expertise and technical tools;
- to advise the national authorities, and help to allocate WHO regular country budget resources to the programme;
- to keep the regional office and headquarters informed and adequately advised on country programme orientation and achievements;
- to inform the country about international trends and about opportunities for intercountry and international cooperation;
- to participate actively in the work of the UNDMT at country level.

The regional office will have full responsibility for managing country and intercountry emergency preparedness programmes, which are essential for the success of any global emergency and humanitarian action undertaking. Its role will include:

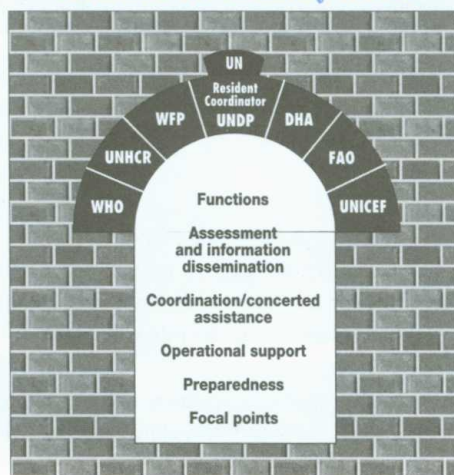
- directing and monitoring WHO country offices in implementing the tasks described above and providing them with technical support;

- planning activities and organizing intercountry projects in support of country programmes;
- developing new project proposals for fund-raising (through headquarters) and monitoring and evaluating them.

The role of **headquarters** should be limited to global activities such as UN interagency undertakings, the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), the development of a pool of experts and support for regional undertakings through:

- fund-raising for project proposals submitted by the regions;
- building a strategy orientation and guidelines for WHO emergency preparedness activities through mainly regular interregional meetings, and developing a network of WHO collaborating centres;
- collaborating with other agencies at international level in developing and disseminating information, publications and material on emergency management, in full cooperation with the regional offices and the network of WHO collaborating centres. ■

UNDMT at country level



In Emergency Preparedness and Disaster reduction

The Resolution EB95.R17, adopted by the Executive Board of WHO in January 1995, "requests the Director-General within available resources:

- 1- to continue to support the efforts of Member States to strengthen their capacity in the field of emergency preparedness so as to protect the development achievements of countries and reduce the vulnerability of communities at risk;*
- 2- to seek extrabudgetary resources which will complement regular budgetary funds for this purpose;*
- 3- to promote and support the development of regional and country emergency preparedness programmes;*
- 4- to continue to promote and actively take part in establishing, with appropriate partners in the United Nations system, a comprehensive, integrated and institutionalized approach to disaster reduction with the objective of ensuring comprehensive support to country programmes and related technical activities;*
- 5- to ensure the coordinated participation of appropriate WHO technical programmes in disaster reduction and preparedness;*
- 6- to further strengthen the technical and structural capacity of regional and interregional emergency preparedness centres."*