

# Strengthening WHO's Institutional Capacity for Humanitarian Health Action

## A changing world

In the current world, preparedness is the key to an effective response to emergencies and crises. Natural disasters and protracted conflicts exact an increasingly heavy human and economic toll. The effects of climate change are unequivocal. Global food insecurity threatens the survival of millions. Governments around the world are faced with plunging budgets and rising deficits as the global financial crisis – the most serious in 60 years – continues unabated.

These developments have devastating effects on the health and well-being of populations, particularly the world's poorest. Health facilities may be reduced to rubble during natural disasters, or looted and ransacked during protracted conflicts. Extreme weather events – storms and floods, droughts and heat or cold waves – may result in the massive movement of populations as crops fail, livelihoods are destroyed and they are forced to seek sustenance elsewhere. In addition, as the financial crisis continues to sweep through world markets, there is a real risk that funds to support humanitarian health action may be reduced just when they are needed most.

## WHO's health leadership

Set against this backdrop of global social and financial turmoil, WHO's humanitarian work becomes ever more important. As the lead agency of the Health Cluster – the United Nations' framework for ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership in humanitarian health emergencies – WHO is expected to take the lead in responding to the health aspects of emergencies and humanitarian crises, providing authoritative health information and guidance to partners, coordinating efforts, filling gaps, helping countries recover and supporting their efforts to build capacity to respond to future crises.

WHO's Five-Year Programme – Strengthening WHO's Institutional Capacity for Humanitarian Health Action 2009-2013 – sets out the Organization's strategy to improve its emergency work in the next five years. This ambitious programme has at its heart the need to improve the health of millions of people, many of whom are among the world's poorest and most at risk whenever disasters strike.

## Strengthening institutional capacity

The Five-Year Programme has two pillars. The first aims to improve WHO's emergency response and recovery work by:

- increasing its presence in countries;
- developing emergency and humanitarian tools, standards and norms to guide health partners;
- training staff and reinforcing emergency administrative procedures;
- implementing the cluster approach in all priority countries and all new emergencies;
- strengthening collaboration with other United Nations agencies and key partners.

The second pillar aims to improve WHO's emergency preparedness work through:

- helping countries develop health risk reduction and emergency preparedness capacities;
- supporting community-based best practices in emergency preparedness and risk reduction;

# A Five-Year Programme **2009-2013**



- providing baseline information on health risks, risk reduction and emergency preparedness capacity in countries;
- building countries' emergency preparedness knowledge and skills through training, guidance, research and information services.

## Resources and implementation

WHO relies almost entirely on extrabudgetary contributions to finance its humanitarian work. The Organization could not sustain its emergency programme without the continuing generous support of its donors. WHO appeals to these same donors to donate flexible, unearmarked funding towards the Five-Year Programme. Doing so will allow WHO to maintain and improve the infrastructures – the logistics and supply systems, media and communications teams, information technology platforms, security arrangements and financial, administrative and project management back-up – that are essential to support its emergency operations in the field and ensure donors' money is spent wisely and well.

A solid presence in countries is essential to allow WHO to work closely with ministries of health and other Health Cluster partners to strengthen emergency preparedness, build national capacity, pool resources and jointly plan and coordinate health activities. Flexible funds will also be used to increase WHO's humanitarian presence in countries and thus ensure that WHO is there, on the ground, and ready and able to respond whenever crises occur.



## Health Action in Crises worldwide

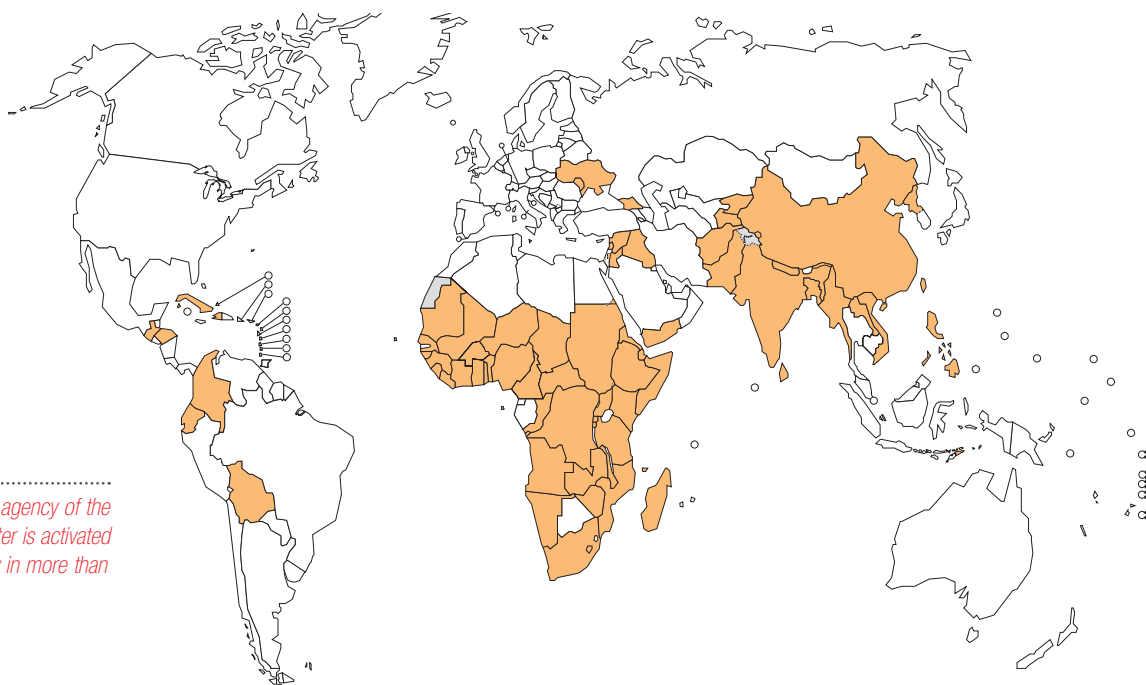
To date, WHO Health Action in Crises staff includes a total of 181 people distributed as follow:

- 78 in country offices,
- 22 in regional offices,
- 81 at headquarters.

More information on the Health Action in Crises Cluster can be found at:

<http://www.who.int/hac/about/en/>

### Health Action in Crises countries of concern in 2008



*In December 2005, WHO was appointed lead agency of the Global Health Cluster. To date, the Health Cluster is activated in 21 countries and was rolled out temporarily in more than a dozen short-term acute crises.*