

Annex 6

Recommended approaches to implementing effective and sustainable multisectoral action on health¹

Health and quality of life of individuals and populations are determined by a complex set of interrelated factors. Such complexity means that measures to promote and protect health and well-being cannot be confined to the health sector alone. Designing and implementing public policies that improve quality of life requires the active involvement and engagement of other sectors of society in all steps of the process.

Working together across sectors to improve health and influence its determinants is often referred to as *intersectoral action on health*. The following guidance aims to present some simple steps that policy-makers can take to work across sectors more systematically in order to improve the health of their citizens and health equity among communities.

Strategies to promote intersectoral action on health

Two overall strategies for promoting intersectoral action can be described:

- One general strategy integrates a systematic consideration of health concerns into all other sectors' routine policy processes, and identifies approaches and opportunities to promote better quality of life: "*Health in all policies*".
- An alternative approach is more issue-centred and narrower, aiming to integrate specific health concerns into relevant sectors' policies, programmes and activities, as appropriate. Widespread adoption of the *WHO Framework Convention of Tobacco Control* is an excellent example of this approach.

Steps to implement intersectoral action on health

There are a series of steps that can be taken to initiate and accomplish intersectoral action on health. The steps described below are relevant to both issue-centred approaches and to the general *Health in all policies* strategy.

Self-assessment

- Assess the health sector's capabilities, readiness, existing relationships with relevant sectors and participation in relevant intergovernmental bodies.
- Strengthen institutional capacity by improving staff abilities to interact with other sectors (e.g. public health expertise, overall understanding of public policies, politics, economics, human rights expertise etc.), in order to identify intersectoral opportunities and communicate potential co-benefits.

Assessment of other sectors

- Achieve a better understanding of other sectors, their policies and priorities, and establish links and means of communication to assess their relevance to the established health priorities.
- Use health impact assessment as a tool to identify potential (positive and negative) health impacts of other sectors' policies, actions that can enhance positive impacts and reduce risks; and the roles and responsibilities of other sectors in achieving healthy policies.
- Conduct a stakeholder and sector analysis. Identify relevant intersectoral processes, bodies, laws, mandates for intersectoral action.
- Improve interaction and strengthen mutual, intersectoral engagement, including through participation in activities led by other sectors.

¹ Based on analysis of international experiences and a series of expert consultations hosted by WHO between June 2009 and October 2010.

Analyse the area of concern

- Define the specific area of concern and potential interventions.
- Present sector-specific, disaggregated data focusing on the impact on other sectors and analyse the feasibility of the intervention.
- Build your case using convincing data to describe how policies in the sector of interest affect health, and propose ways these can be changed to promote health-related co-benefits. Use evidence to highlight potential co-benefits.

Develop engagement plans

- Develop a strategy to involve relevant sectors. The emphasis is on win-win and the creation of a climate of trust. Salient features of the plan include shared goals and targets; pooled resources; defined tasks, roles and responsibilities. Selection of an engagement approach is a key component in the plan and the approach can be on sector, issue or even “opportunistic” basis.

Use a framework to foster common understanding between sectors

- A key factor for successful intersectoral action is the ability to identify a common understanding of the key issues and required actions to address them. This can be aided through the use of the same framework to facilitate a common understanding of the causal pathways and key intervention points.

Strengthen governance structures, political will and accountability mechanisms

- Establish/strengthen governance structures to ensure successful intersectoral action. Examples include national constitutions, presidential mandates, adoption of new laws, compulsory reporting, human rights accountability, shared budgets, and implementation of international agreements such as the FCTC.
- Develop accountability mechanisms by means such as promoting open access to information, meaningful public/civil society participation at all levels, disclosure, grievance and ombudsperson functions.
- Utilize relevant sections of human rights treaties, and reporting mechanisms mandated by international agreements, to support integration of health determinants across sectors.

Enhance community participation

- Enhance community participation throughout the policy development, implementation and evaluation processes through public consultation/hearings, disseminating information using mass media, web-based tools and facilitating the equal and meaningful involvement of constituency/NGO representatives at all levels.

Choose other good practices to foster intersectoral action

- Join other sectors in establishing common policies/programmes/initiatives with joint reporting on implementation with common targets.
- Be an agent in other sectors’ policies/programmes/initiatives, and invite other sectors to be an agent in yours.
- Provide tools and techniques to include health in the policies of other sectors and to address health inequalities/inequities (e.g. health impact assessment, economic analysis, data disaggregated by gender, class, ethnicity, participatory research, and qualitative analysis etc.).

Monitor and evaluate

- Follow closely the implementation of intersectoral action through monitoring and evaluation processes in order to determine the progress in achieving planned outcomes, and identify opportunities for productive changes in approach.