

**WHO 8th Global Conference on Health Promotion: Health in All Policies
Helsinki, 10-14 June 2013
Report**

Among the nearly 900 delegates of the WHO 8GCHP selected NGOs have also been invited.

The Alliance was represented by three of its Board Members, Joanna Koch, Associated Country Women of the World, Charles Senessie, Afro-European Medical and Research Centre and Gabriella Sozanski, International Health Co-operative Organisation. The Alliance partner, the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine of the Geneva University was represented by Sandrine Motamed.

Participants expressed their common understanding of and commitment to the Helsinki Statement on Health in All Policies that was the outcome document of the conference as well as the Framework for Country Action.

The Peoples' Health Movement coordinated NGO comments on the Statement and submitted an alternative statement, a Call to Action.

Sauli Niinistö, President of Finland opened the Conference. *The Minister, Susanna Huovinen* said :

“This conference can mark a turning point in implementing Health in all policies at the various levels of policy-making and thus make a real difference. However, the changes will not happen automatically. We need to continue our efforts to bring about an understanding and will within our governments, politicians, other policy-makers, people and their organizations that health and health equity are important values and that they make a difference in the society. We may need to remind the government about their responsibilities for health.”

“Today, we start to see the true power of this approach to influence factors that go beyond but are ultimately linked to health: issues of poverty, water and sanitation, safety and security, sustainable economic and social development,” said *Dr Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General, non-communicable diseases and mental health*. « Putting health in all policies is the way to improve people's chances for a healthy life, while, at the same time, achieve policy objectives in other areas.”

Health promotion and health in all policies are important priorities for Finland. Therefore Finland offered to host the conference. “Finland is in the forefront to tackle health problems of the future because of our past and present actions and experiences in public health”, says *Pekka Puska, Director General of the National Institute of Health and Welfare*. “The public health improvement in Finland has been possible through dedicated and theory-based action involving many sectors, Puska continues”

Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organisation gave a powerful speech at the opening ceremony, condemning the effect of industry on global health, and

asking participants to challenge the Big Food, Big Money Clan etc. Her ideas were added into the final Statement of the Conference.

A couple of her statements :

« Health promotion has never before enjoyed such prominence, never before had such powerful policy tools at its disposal, and never before faced such daunting challenges »

« In our closely interconnected world health everywhere is being shaped by the same powerful forces : demographic ageing, rapid urbanization, and the globalization of unhealthy lifestyles. Under the pressure of these forces, chronic noncommunicable diseases have overtaken infectious diseases as the leading cause of morbidity, disability and mortality. »

« Instead of diseases vanishing as living conditions improve, socio-economic progress is actually creating the conditions that favour the rise of noncommunicable diseases... The globalization of unhealthy lifestyles is by no means just a technical issue for public health. It is a political issue. It is a trade issue. And it is an issue for foreign affairs. »

« ... inequalities, between and within countries, in income levels, opportunities and health outcomes are now greater than at any time in recent decades. We increasingly live in a world of rich countries full of poor and sick people. »

« Today getting people to lead healthy lifestyles and adopt healthy behaviours faces opposition from forces that are not so friendly. Efforts to prevent noncommunicable diseases go against the business interests of powerful economic operators. This is one of the biggest challenges facing health promotion.

....It is not just Big Tobacco anymore. Public health must also contend with Big Food, Big Soda, and Big Alcohol. All of these industries fear regulation and protect themselves by using the same tactics.

They include arguments that place the responsibility for harm to health on individuals, and portray government actions as interference in personal liberties and free choice.

....Market power readily translates into political power. Few governments prioritize health over big business.

....This is a failure of political will to take on big business.

...The efforts by industry to shape the public health policies and strategies that affect their products are dangerous.

The formulation of health policies must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests - she said.

*Health in All Policies – Seizing opportunities, implementing policies
the Conference background documentation*

The book launch was held 9 June in Helsinki. The publication captures a wide range of experiences from around the world. Its starting point is straightforward : the determinants of health are broad : health is profoundly, often adversely, affected by policies made in non-health sectors. These policies may arise from the decisions of various government ministries or from the workings of the international systems that govern trade business relations and financial markets.

The major threats to population health were largely an environmental rather than a medical problem.

The political declaration of the UN High-level meeting on the prevention and control of Non-communicable Diseases NCDs singled out prevention as the cornerstone for the global response to these diseases.

The two major documents of the Conference are the Framework for Country Action and the Statement. Both draft documents are the products of a public consultation process.

1. Health in All Policies Framework for Country Action

Many of the determinants of health and health inequities in populations have social and economic origins that are beyond the direct influence of the health sector and health policies. The 2011 Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health and the 2011 Political Declaration of the UN High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases are unequivocal in their recognition of the responsibility of governments for the health of their citizens, reaffirming that health inequities between and within countries are politically, socially and economically unacceptable, as well as unfair and largely avoidable. To achieve health for all is a challenge and a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach provides a response for the challenge.

HiAP is an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health implications of decisions, seeks synergies, and avoids harmful health impacts in order to improve population health and health equity.

HiAP is founded on health-related rights and obligations. It improves accountability of policymakers for health impacts at all levels of policy-making. It includes an emphasis on the consequences of public policies on health systems, determinants of health, and well-being. It also contributes to sustainable development.

In recent years, governments have increasingly come to realize that they can achieve health, social, environmental and economic goals by actively exploring the potential synergies between and within policies in sectors such as transport, agriculture, education, employment and environment. Action has therefore been scaled up to implement the HiAP approach in line with relevant political declarations. To this end, efforts have been made to determine what it is, and more importantly how it works and how progress can be reported. Attempts have also been made to build the capacity to implement the approach.

Training for HiAP can be challenging, as it is generally not a part of medical, legal or civil service training nor for that matter public health training, which can often be too narrow in scope. HiAP should therefore be incorporated in the education of future health professionals, especially those training in health care management and public health policy. Capacity building for HiAP also greatly relies on experiential learning under the guidance of experts or experienced bodies, such as government agencies, who can facilitate inter-country exchange and learning.

The community level is core to HiAP capacity building and may include raising awareness about health risks and undertaking community action for health. To this end, people in the wider community must be able to foster community identity and cohesion, facilitate access to external resources, and develop structures for community decision-making, among others. Community capacity building concerns the ability of community members to take action to address their health through social and political support that is required for successful implementation of policies and programs that have an impact on health.

The Framework document will be finalized after the Conference and will put on the Conference website by 31 August 2013.

2. The Helsinki Statement on Health in All Policies

The NGO lobby group managed to get a sentence included in the section « We call on governments » which reads as follows :
« Include communities, social movements and civil society in the development, implementation and monitoring of Health in All Policies, building health literacy in the population ».

The Alliance has submitted several comments in written form and orally which were partly incorporated in the final text. However, the PHM found it necessary to issue an alternative statement, a Call to Action reflecting the various points of view of the civil society which were missing from the official statement. The Call to Action was entitled « Promoting Health for All and Social Justice in the Era of Global Capitalism ».

Personal impressions

Helsinki was a very technical Conference - health professionals talking to health professionals. Little space was given to grass roots input. Although the Finnish hosts have made serious efforts to include case studies during the parallel sessions following the plenary.

However, the Conference was a great place for networking and making good contacts for REPSSI. I have distributed REPSSI flyers and information on the certificate programme. A Contact list is attached for follow-up.

The Alliance for Health Promotion put together a questionnaire and interviewed participants mainly from African countries. WHO has covered the costs of 43 representatives from low-income countries to the Conference. The few answers received gave us some valuable information..

2 July