

## PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES INFORMATION SHEET

Name of the Partnership/Initiative  
Children=s Environmental Health Indicators

**Expected date of initiation:** January 2003  
**Expected date of completion:** January 2007

### **Partners Involved:**

#### ***Governments:***

United States of America (USA), Italy, South Africa, Mexico

#### ***Intergovernmental organizations:***

World Health Organization (WHO)  
United Nations Children=s Fund (UNICEF)  
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)  
Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD)  
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

#### ***Major groups:***

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR)  
International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE)  
International Network on Children's Health, Environment and Safety (INCHES)

#### ***Proposing Partner:***

**This initiative is proposed for consideration and adoption by the global community, followed by the creation of an international task force of experts. This international task force would be aware of and familiar with ongoing regional efforts to create and use children's environmental health indicators so that regional progress can be used to advance the global effort.**

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### **Main objectives of the Partnership/Initiative**

Increase collaboration among governments, non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, the private sector, communities, and UN agencies to protect children from environmental health threats.

Under the UN system and with collaboration of governments, NGOs, and other interested parties, develop and promote use of children's environmental health indicators.

Propose modifications to the existing data collection surveys in the UN system to incorporate data needs for core children's environmental health indicators and in turn, develop and promote the use of such indicators.

Improve assessment of children's environmental health and monitor the success or failure of interventions to address specific children's environmental health problems.

Facilitate the ability of policy-makers to improve environmental conditions, specifically for children.

### **Relationship with Agenda 21 and Millennium Declaration**

The importance of children's environmental health is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 of Agenda 21 (AProtecting and Promoting Human Health). This initiative is designed to help achieve specific objectives stated in Agenda 21:

- § Reducing childhood illness and death from diarrhea (6.12.e).
- § Reducing childhood mortality from and ensuring adequate treatment for acute respiratory infections (6.12.f).
- § Dissemination of information on the risk and control of diseases (6.13.b.).
- § Prevention of diseases through control of environmental factors (6.13.d).
- § Improvement of health indicators for urban dwellers and development of new quantitative objectives for urban health (6.33).
- § Identification and compilation of statistical information on health effects to support cost/benefit analysis, prevention and abatement measures (6.40).

Improving children's environmental health is also an important step toward meeting goals of the Millennium Declaration. For example:

- § *Reduce child mortality.* Two of the major killers of children, acute respiratory infections and diarrhea, have strong links to environmental exposure. Addressing environmental health threats is a critical step in reducing child mortality.
- § *Ensure environmental sustainability.* This broad goal includes the specific objective of reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. This is a critical step toward improving children's health, because children bear a disproportionate burden from waterborne illnesses.
- § *Achieve universal primary education.* Unsanitary school environments cause many girls to drop out of school and can result in illnesses, such as diarrhea and worm

- infections, that affect learning and school attendance. Universal education cannot be achieved until school environments are safe and healthy for all children.
- § *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.* Diarrhea exacerbates hunger and malnutrition. Efforts to improve nutrition must include measures to prevent diarrheal diseases.
- § *Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.* Malaria exposure risk is closely related to environmental conditions that allow disease-carrying mosquitos to breed. Reducing this environmental exposure risk is an important part of an effective malaria prevention strategy.

**Expected results:**

This effort will foster international communication and coordination to develop and test children=s environmental health indicators. This may involve developing new indicators, identifying the most useful existing indicators for specific problems, identifying data sources and gaps, and setting priorities for action.

Children=s environmental health indicators will prove to be effective tools for

- understanding the status of children=s environmental health in countries;
- monitoring trends in the environment, in order to identify potential risks to health;
- monitoring trends in health resulting from exposures to environmental risk factors,
- investigating potential connections between environmental conditions and health outcomes;
- raising awareness about environmental health issues across stake-holder groups;
- producing data to establish baselines, share best practices, and measure progress toward stated goals;
- informing policy making at all levels of government; and
- targeting actions where they are most needed.

**Specific targets of the Partnership/Initiative and time frame for their achievement:**

Central to the concept of sustainable development is the capacity of children to sustain, build, and improve the societies they inherit. Healthy children learn better and are able to lead more productive lives, creating a strong base on which an economy can grow and society can prosper. Alone, indicators will not solve all the urgent problems facing children around the globe. But they will provide an important tool to policy-makers, enabling them to make better decisions and design effective interventions that will protect children from the many environmental health threats they currently face.

Governments, non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, the private sector, communities, and UN agencies must work together to develop, implement, monitor, and report on indicators in order to improve and safeguard children=s environmental health. There is much to be gained from sharing best practices and sharing data, as well as by better collaboration among the national and international actors involved with children=s environmental health.

Together, all interested parties can join forces to protect children and make *systematic use* of children=s environmental health indicators. By focusing on the world=s children, we invest in our future and the future of generations to come.

Next steps include:

*Years 1 - 2*

Develop child-specific indicators to monitor the effects of environmental risk factors on children=s health with relevance to decision-making. Identify and work with key agencies and institutes that will be implementing the process at the country level.

*Years 3 - 4*

Conduct pilot studies to validate the applicability of selected indicators. Pilot studies will be cooperative efforts conducted with partner organizations and countries that are already working on children=s environmental health issues. Integrate children=s environmental health indicators with existing surveys; where surveys are not in place, encourage survey design or community self-assessment efforts. Coordinate efforts to monitor and report on indicators so that data collected, indicators used, and interventions undertaken are informative and useful. Publish results.

**Coordination and Implementation mechanism**

A steering committee of representatives from a broad spectrum of organizations and geographic locations, including governments of developed and developing nations, multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations, and health and environment specialists working in the field would be formed. This group will coordinate the efforts of various partner organizations to take maximum advantage of their diversity of experience and perspectives.

**Arrangements for funding and other resources**

The following organizations are currently potential sources of financial or in-kind contributions. Others may be identified at a later date.

*Governmental organizations:*

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),  
other partner countries

*Intergovernmental organizations:*

United Nations Children=s Fund (UNICEF),  
World Health Organization (WHO)  
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)  
Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD)  
other regional or international organizations

**Arrangements for capacity building and technology transfer**

This initiative is designed to foster communication among various organizations to determine the best ways to transfer technology and build the capacity to use children's environmental health indicators in different parts of the world. The details of these arrangements will be determined by participants during the course of this project and may vary from region to region reflecting different needs.

**Links of Partnership/Initiative with on-going sustainable development activities at the international and/or regional level (if any)**

These efforts will build upon and complement projects already underway the focus on environmental health, children or indicators.

- Canada is presenting a Type 1 proposal on environment and health linkages at the World Summit.
- The North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation has a resolution and agenda for action on children's environmental health for the US, Canada, and Mexico.
- The Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas agreed in March, 2002 to further develop, harmonize as appropriate, and use indicators to inform decision-makers in environment and health management and to support scientific assessment capacity-building to integrate health and environment efforts for the region.
- In April, 2002 the Group of Eight called on WHO, OECD and other countries and organization to take specific action to improve children's environmental health.
- OECD is proposing work on economic valuation of children's health effects due to environmental pollution and degradation, together with its work on environmental indicators, this will complement WHO's ongoing work.
- At the World Health Assembly in May, 2002, WHO announced plans to launch an initiative on children's environmental health at WSSD.
- UNEP focuses on environmental health and the impact of chemicals.
- The WHO / UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation compiles extensive data on water supply and sanitation coverage, system performance, and infrastructure investment.

**Monitoring Arrangements**

The working group will meet 2 or 3 times per year during the first two years, and once per year thereafter. These meetings will provide an opportunity to assess progress and adjust goals and resources accordingly.

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