

The Papua New Guinea vision of Healthy Islands

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Abstract

A uniquely Papua New Guinea vision of the *Healthy Islands* concept is outlined. It has as its core concept, the recognition that *Healthy Islands* should be places where children are nurtured in body and mind, environments invite learning and leisure; people work and age with dignity; and ecological balance is a source of pride. The concept integrates a series of thematic activities that focus on the preparation of life, protection of life and the quality of life, with a series of geographical settings that vary from the nation of Papua New Guinea as *Healthy Islands* to the individual home. It is operationalized through pragmatic definitions and vision statements, and it is proposed that we must avoid defining it to the degree that it becomes time-bound and risks becoming fossilized. Examples of *Healthy Island* activities are briefly outlined. The basic features of the *Healthy Islands* concept is discussed in the context of the Pacific way.

Introduction

The *New Horizons in Health* concept was endorsed in 1994 by the World Health Organization (WHO), Western Pacific Regional Committee¹ and revised in 1995 to reflect on increased emphasis on the importance of country level action². In March 1995, at a meeting of Ministers of Health of the Pacific countries at Yanuca Island, Fiji, consensus was reached on a course of action to place health and well-being

of Pacific islanders at the centre of national development plans. This was reflected in the Yanuca Island Declaration which was the Pacific's response to *New Horizons in Health*, the framework document of the Western Pacific Region of the WHO.

The Yanuca Island Declaration adopted the concept of a "*Healthy Islands*" as the unifying theme for health promotion and health protection in the island nations of the Pacific for the twenty-first century. It identified three priority issues for attention, namely, the development of the health workforce, environmental health and the supply and management of pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and essential drugs³.

At a follow-up meeting of Ministers of Health of the Pacific Islands in Rarotonga in August 1997, the Rarotonga Agreement: Towards Healthy Islands, was adopted⁴. In the Rarotonga Agreement, the definition of the *Healthy Islands* concept, core elements and framework were further elaborated. It was further noted that "the *Healthy Islands* concept involved continuously identifying and resolving priority issues related to health, development and well-being by advocating, facilitating and enabling these issues to be addressed in partnerships among communities, organizations and agencies at local, national and regional levels "

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) context

In August 1995, a major government reform was passed by Parliament to transfer responsibility for most functions from the National Government to the Provincial and Local Governments. Under the new Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local Governments, provincial governments now had direct control over the use of allocated resources. Hence, health programmes would be delivered at the district level and would compete for resources against other sectors. In the light of the above, the National Health Plan 1996-2000⁵ incorporated five national policy priorities that formed the core of the Plan, namely:

- Increase Services to the Rural Majority;
- Expand Health Promotion and Preventive Services;
- Reorganize and Restructure the National Health System;
- Develop Staff Professional, Technical and Management Skills; and
- Upgrade and Maintain Investment in Health Infrastructure.

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The National Health Plan 1996-2000 also incorporated the basic concept of *New Horizons in Health*. The final paragraph of the executive summary brings this together.

"The goal of this Plan is to develop a health system that is responsive, readily accessible to the majority of the population and sustainable. At the same time this system must stress the responsibilities of individuals for their actions, in the context of community support, as outlined in *New Horizons in Health* the WHO Western Pacific's framework for health in the 21st century. If all levels of governments work together as a nation within this framework, the country can look forward to *New Horizons in Health* beyond the year 2000, where self-reliant individuals have prepared themselves for healthy living in a *healthy island* environment."

From 1995 onwards, propelled by the major reforms of decentralization, the evolution of the *New Horizons in Health* concept into the Papua New Guinea vision of *Healthy Islands*, picked up greater and greater momentum until a specifically Papua New Guinea vision has evolved into reality.

The *Healthy Islands* concept involves continuously identifying and resolving related priority issues, by advocating, facilitating and enabling these issues to be addressed in partnership among communities, organizations and agencies, at local, national and regional levels.

The PNG vision of Healthy Islands

The Papua New Guinea vision of *Healthy Islands* is built on the core concept identified in the Yanuca Island Declaration which notes that:

- "Healthy Islands should be places where,*
- *children are nurtured in body and mind;*
 - *environments invite learning and leisure;*
 - *people work and age with dignity; and*
 - *ecological balance is a source of pride."*³

1. The PNG concept of Healthy Islands

Over a number of years, it has become increasingly clear that the core concept of *Healthy Islands* must incorporate the following:

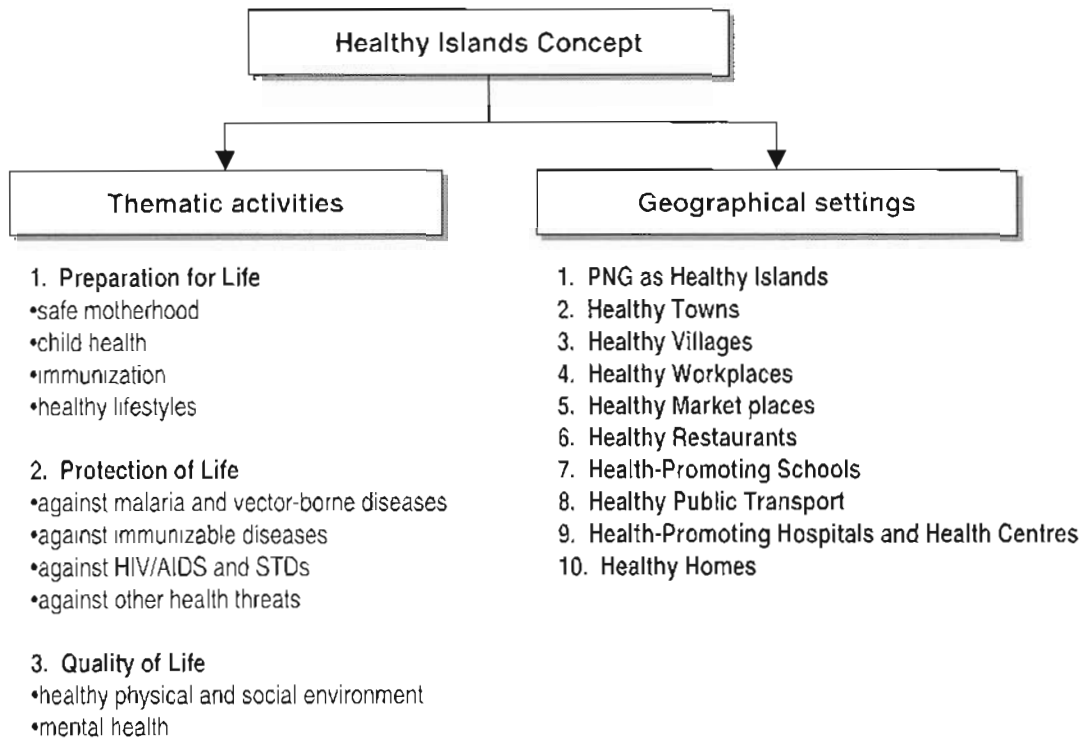
- a) Health promotion and health protection remain as the central and core business;
- b) It calls for a reorientation of health services away from hospital controlled services, requiring policy shift and resource reorientation,
- c) One of its chief features is the principle of enabling individuals, families and communities to prepare themselves for healthy living and healthy lifestyles in the context of community support,
- d) It recognizes the integration of health and environment, advocates the involvement of individuals and communities in the decision making process and facilitates the

multi-sectoral approach to health for the social well-being of the population. It advocates partnership and a population focused approach, rather than disease focused approach.

The *Healthy Islands* concept involves continuously identifying and resolving related priority issues, by advocating, facilitating and enabling these issues to be addressed in partnership among communities, organizations and agencies, at local, national and regional levels.

- e) The *Healthy Islands* concept is not unique and new. It consolidates aspects of health care, and social and economic well-being, placing them in a conceptual setting that encompasses political engagement, social acceptability and one that guarantees sustainability.
- f) The *Healthy Islands* concept encompasses every aspect of health from the individual to the family, community and the nation, from the smallest health unit to the district, the province, region, to the national level; from the core of health activities to encompass every aspect of health in other sectors be these education, agriculture, housing, transport, business, private sector or NGOs and churches.
- g) The concept is the concern of all levels of the health system, be it planning, policy, health promotion, health protection, health care delivery or curative care, and it includes every aspect of health from conception to old age.
- h) The *Healthy Islands* concept is not an addition to existing services. It encompasses a major paradigm shift. This shift does have major implications on resource allocation, resource utilization, resource mobilization, and resource orientation.
- i) The development of the *Healthy Islands* approach must be flexible so that country specific needs are addressed, as well as adaptable enough to adequately and efficiently address changing circumstances.
- j) The *Healthy Islands* concept underpins all development.
- k) The *Healthy Islands* concept is not a state, but a responsible, adaptable process. In seeking the proper definition on *Healthy Islands*, we must avoid defining to the degree that we determine a state of affairs called "*Healthy Islands*". This is the traditional approach, which we would want to shift away from because it encourages limitations, brought about by a time-bound definition of concepts. At the same time in order to clarify to stakeholders what this concept or approach is, the definition and identification of components of the *Healthy Islands* concept and entry points and operational definitions, must be clearly determined, because the issues are best addressed in the context of settings, such as the home, village, school, and operational definitions.

Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of Healthy Islands concept and how it can be operationalized



2. Operationalizing the concept in PNG

Figure 1 shows in a schematic manner, the concept of *Healthy Islands* as is being operationalized in PNG. The *Healthy Islands* concept is the overarching concept under which a variety of thematic activities will be applied to the various geographical settings which can vary from the nation of Papua New Guinea to the individual homes of the people who live in PNG.

It should be pointed out that the examples of thematic activities is flexible and can be added to, modified or combined according to the group who are responsible for carrying these out. The list is not exhaustive or even mutually exclusive. For example, it is in order if a group combines safe motherhood with reproductive health, or healthy lifestyles and child health.

Similarly, the geographical settings or entities are not mutually exclusive and can be combined or distinguished as smaller more manageable settings or entities. For example, a Healthy Town would include Healthy Workplaces, Healthy Marketplaces, Healthy Restaurants, Healthy Public Transport, Health-promoting Schools, Health-promoting Hospitals and Health Centres and of course, Healthy Homes.

However, the hall-mark is the flexible nature of how the concept can be operationalized in manageable portions. For example, a local district might want to start with one or

more Health-Promoting Schools. At a later stage, it may feel ready to include its local marketplace and restaurants.

Along the same lines, a setting may initially begin with just one set of thematic activities before including other thematic activities. For example, a Healthy Workplace may begin by initiating activities aimed at promoting a healthy physical and social environment. Later it may expand to include healthy lifestyles and the protection of life against HIV/AIDS and STDs.

3. Developing objectives and vision statements for each setting

An essential step in operationalizing the *Healthy Islands* concept is the development of objectives and vision statements as guides to the identification of relevant thematic activities to be included in the setting. Vision statements have been developed in PNG and take the form of poetry or statements. Examples of a few vision statements are given below to illustrate their contents. It is worthwhile pointing out that these vision statements are seen as dynamic and will be modified as the social, cultural, economic and health environments change.

3.1 Vision and objectives for Health-Promoting Schools

A Health-Promoting School (HPS) is a setting which offers a comprehensive programme to promote the health of

young people and is supported by the curriculum, the school environment, the interface between the school and the community, as well as links with health and welfare services.

The characteristics of a Health-Promoting School can be expressed as in the following poem

My Dream School, Is it Possible?

*My dream is to be in a special school.
A school where I can feel safe
Where I am treated same as the other child
Where I am treated with respect and dignity
A place where I feel that I belong
Where I feel free to explore myself and my environment.
A place where I find love, peace and security
Where I have a choice of nutritious food
Where I can turn on a tap and drink fresh clean water
Where I have a shade tree to sit under when the sun is too hot
Where the grass is green and I have a place to play
A place where I find of friends
Where my teachers are caring and my parents are supportive
A place where I am excited to go to school each day
A place where I am not abused and harassed
A place free of drugs and full of fun
and lots of beautiful flowers, red, yellow, white and all sorts of colours
My special school is where I am free to love, to learn and to grow in every way
A place where I am protected from the wind, the sun, the rain and cold
Regardless of my race, my religion, and culture, or where I come from,
I am nurtured as a very, very special person
This my dream, is it possible? Can my dream be fulfilled?
Who can make my dream come true?*

3.2 Vision and objectives of Healthy Marketplaces

The objective of a Healthy Marketplace is to provide a healthy setting for the distribution of safe and nutritious food to the community in addition to it being the commercial and social centre for the municipality.

The characteristics of a Health Marketplace are:

- the market and the environment are clean and hygienic;
- the market reflects the local culture and traditions of the people;
- hygienic principles of food safety is strictly followed;
- food inspection and analysis is routinely done for the improvement of food safety;
- basic facilities such as safe water, sanitation and solid waste disposal are adequately available for the use of market vendors and the public;

- the market sets the example to people about a range of health issues especially on keeping food safe for better health,
- the management and the vendors are aware of the dangers of chemical and microbiological contamination of food including adulteration and take appropriate measures to prevent such occurrences;
- municipal authorities responsible for the management of the market make every effort to improve food safety through food laws and its enforcement, the provision of adequate infrastructure and services, training and education of vendors and raising consumer awareness;
- there is partnership between market administration, vendors and health and environment authorities to keep the market clean, healthy and safe for the public.

3.3 Vision and objectives for Healthy Restaurants

A Healthy Restaurant is where nutritious and healthy food is hygienically prepared, served, stored and sold for public consumption and recreation.

The characteristics of a Healthy Restaurant are:

- the premises used for preparation, sale and eating of food are planned, constructed and maintained according to the health standards and are kept clean and hygienic at all times (ventilation, lighting and fly proof)
- there is adequate provision for clean water for hand washing and cooking at all times,
- there is adequate refrigeration facilities for safe storage of frozen foods;
- the kitchen, hot water, gas, electrical and ventilation equipment are properly installed and in good working order,
- safety measures are in place and fire exits are marked and easily accessible,
- utensils used for food preparation, storage and serving, are safe and clean at all times;
- there is adequate provision for the sanitary disposal of human and restaurant waste,
- the management and employees are trained in the handling and preparation of food, and take precaution to prevent food contamination and poisoning;
- tobacco smoking and chewing of betel nuts are not permitted on the premises;
- choices are made of fresh, healthy and nutritious vegetables, fruits, oil, meat and fish in food preparation; and
- good cooperation exists between the local health, municipal authorities and restaurant management to safeguard public interest regarding health and nutrition.

3.4 Vision and objectives for Healthy Workplaces

A Healthy Workplace is a setting where the work environment is free of any health hazard leading to occupational

disease or disability, and is promotive of individual family and the community's health.

The characteristics of a Healthy Workplace are:

- the site and surroundings are safe, clean and tidy, and conducive to the health of the workers;
- the buildings, factories and office spaces are planned, constructed and maintained according to minimum health standards (adequate ventilation, lighting, space, drainage, dust and noise and fume free environment etc),
- there is provision of safe water for drinking and washing, and the sanitary disposal of industrial and human waste;
- the management promotes good ergonomics and safe work practices and the workplace is conducive to the health needs all workers especially women;
- there is provision for emergency treatment and first aid facilities;
- there are mechanisms for dialogue between management and employees to promote health and safety;
- smoking and substance abuse are absent;
- the management is supportive of legislation and standards on occupational safety and hazards, and
- the management, government agencies and workers act in partnership to promote individual and collective health.

... health promotion and protection, with its emphasis on the responsibility of the individual and the family to prepare themselves for healthy living and healthy lifestyles... replaces the disease-centred approach to health.

The implementation status of Healthy Island activities

In 1995, the basic concept of *New Horizons in Health* were incorporated into the National Health Plan 1996-2000. On 25th January 1998, the National Executive Council (Cabinet) of Papua New Guinea endorsed the Rarotonga Agreement: Towards Healthy Islands. In February 1998, the Hon. Ludger Mond, Minister for Health, Papua New Guinea officially launched the *Healthy Islands* concept by declaring 1998 as "The Year of Healthy Islands".

The Health-Promoting Schools programme has been endorsed by the Department of Education and Department of Health as a national policy to promote and protect health. A National Coordinating Committee for Health-Promoting Schools was formed in July 1995. A working group composed of representatives from the Department of Health, Department of Education and WHO meets every month for the purpose of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Seven provinces, namely Western Highlands, Central Province, Madang, West New Britain, Eastern Highlands, Southern Highlands and the National Capital District have formed Provincial Health-Promoting Schools Committees to promote the expansion of Health-Promoting Schools

in all community schools and other related-institutions and for coordination of the programme. Schools in these provinces have Health-Promoting Schools Committees. The Holy Trinity Teacher's Training College and the Madang Teacher's College have adopted the Health-Promoting School's concept and their graduates will be a potent force to disseminate and implement the Health-Promoting Schools concept as well as act as vehicles for promoting *healthy lifestyles* as a way of life. A 28 minute video which introduces the Health-Promoting Schools Programme in Papua New Guinea has been produced. It will serve as a medium of promotion to all 3,000 community schools in Papua New Guinea. A poster of "My Dream Schools, Is It Possible?" has been developed and is being distributed to all 3,000 community schools in PNG. A teacher's manual on

how to start a Health-Promoting Schools programme has been published for distribution to community schools in PNG.

In the PNG context, health promotion and protection, with its emphasis on the responsibility of the indi-

vidual and the family to prepare themselves for healthy living and healthy lifestyles, in the context of community support with multisectoral, multidisciplinary partnerships, replaces the disease-centred approach to health. Thus, an important aspect of thematic activities aimed at preparation for life and protection of life, have been the series of booklets aimed at the individual and family to prepare themselves for healthy lifestyles and healthy living. For example, 26,000 copies of an English language booklet on "Healthy lifestyles: Things to do to stay healthy" and a pidgin translation of the booklet been produced for distribution in PNG.

A booklet on "Your questions answered on HIV/AIDS" was launched by the Minister for Health in April 1997. A pidgin translation of the booklet is under preparation. Booklets on "Your questions answered on Tuberculosis - Stop TB" and "Your questions answered on Malaria and other insect-borne diseases" have been produced and are under translation into pidgin.

Along the same lines, a booklet entitled "Six nutrition messages for good health" has been produced to help Papua New Guinea women and children make the right food choices. Locally tested menus for children and women are provided as examples in the booklets.

Healthy Town (city) activities have been initiated in Port Moresby and Healthy Village activities have also been initiated in a number of villages. The first Healthy Village, Yalu Village in Morobe, was declared a Healthy Village in 1998.

A National Coordinating Committee on *Healthy Islands* (NCCHI) has been formed and will be responsible for implementing the Plan of Action in Papua New Guinea.

Discussion

In PNG, the *Healthy Islands* action plan is a framework for national health development in the twenty first century. It is not a stand alone project or plan of action of the Department of Health. The plan will be implemented by partners and stakeholders having interest in health and national development. These partners include various government departments, non-government organizations, the private sector, communities as well as individuals. The strategies and activities highlighted in the plan will be incorporated into the respective sectoral plans of action. As much as possible the activities will be integrated into existing programmes rather than as added activities. In this way, existing budgets and personnel will be the main-stay of the *Healthy Islands* approach to the multisectoral, multidisciplinary cooperative effort at achieving a *Healthy Islands* status for PNG.

A feature of the PNG concept of *Healthy Islands* is the emphasis on health protection along with the principle of enabling individuals, families and communities to prepare themselves for healthy living and healthy lifestyles. It can be likened to providing health security to the people. Health security includes the information necessary for self-reliance and a working and living environment where health risks are controlled. It also means empowering people to make the right choices in health, enabling them to cope with changing patterns of vulnerability, and building their capacity to keep themselves and their families healthy⁶. Masao Ueda notes that in promoting healthy lifestyles, we need to bear in mind that our natural heritage is rich with healthy lifestyles and activities, which promote physical fitness, such as fishing, hunting, farming, and dancing; activities which promote mental health such as singing, chanting and wholesome forms of competition, and activities that promote social cohesiveness through community projects⁷.

Another critical feature of the PNG concept of *Healthy Islands* is the emphasis on multisectoral, multidisciplinary partnerships - the building of alliances - across sectors, disciplines, professions and organizations. The importance of this has been highlighted at the Third International Conference on Health Promotion held in Sundsvall, Sweden⁸. An intersectoral approach helps to ensure that priorities are coherent and do not conflict with those of individual sectors⁹.

A further feature of the PNG concept of *Healthy Islands*, is the recognition of the integration of health and the environment. However, it is important to point out that this is broader than the early views of *Healthy Islands* seen as solely environmental health. *Healthy Islands* advocates the

involvement of individual and communities. It advocates partnership and a population focused approach. As has been pointed out, Pacific cultures are fragile ecosystems supporting communities of people who need to hold this balance. *Healthy Islands* is all about learning together in the Pacific way - sharing with mutual respect. It is about Pacific people making their purposes clear and linking these with broad-based participation to protect and manage their futures^{10,11}.

The proposal that the *Healthy Islands* concept underpins all development is fundamental. There is evidence that ill-health is a cause of poverty, and poverty is a cause of ill-health¹². The protection and improvement of health must be a central objective to all environment and development strategies¹³.

Finally, based on past experience where concepts keep becoming "out-dated" at a constant regularity, it is proposed that it is important to avoid defining the concept to a degree where the definition becomes unduly time-bound and a fossilized.

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