

Public Information

The World Health Organization's work in public information has from the first had two different but related purposes. The first is, in the words of the Constitution, "to assist in developing an informed public opinion among all peoples on matters of health." The second is to rouse and satisfy a general interest in WHO and its work.

Activities of the first kind are necessary for the success of the programmes in which the Organization assists countries to raise the health standards of their citizens. Clearly, projects to control disease and promote health are unlikely to have lasting results unless they are actively supported by people who know why the projects are being undertaken and what their effect on everyday life will be.

The second group of activities is connected with the existence of WHO itself, for the Organization can effectively express international solidarity in health work only if its objectives and programmes are fully understood by as many people in as many countries as possible. If the public is not provided with adequate and accurate information on the problems and work of WHO it can hardly be expected to give it the necessary support.

Often the two aspects of WHO's public information work overlap and merge. For example, to win public support for large campaigns to eradicate malaria, the importance of insect resistance to insecticides must be made clear. Similarly, for a programme against the hazards of atomic radiation to be acceptable the public must be made aware of the health risks involved in the use of nuclear energy and how these can be minimized. The value of the Organization's policies and programmes will be appreciated only if the scientific facts underlying them are made widely known.

In planning its own information services, the Organization had three sources on which to draw: first, the great experience accumulated by com-

mercial publicity in the use and development of the various media of mass communication—which no information service can afford to neglect; secondly, the less keenly developed but more appropriate information work of various governments; and, lastly, the techniques evolved by the United Nations and others of its specialized agencies in the years before 1948, which were readily adaptable to the needs of WHO.

One of the more obvious tasks of WHO's information service is to satisfy requests, from individuals, groups or organizations, for information on the Organization, or on some aspect of its work. That the questions are asked shows that interest has already been roused, that the information given is likely to be well used and that it may stimulate an active and lasting interest.

Inquiries may come from individuals or from groups—and may be for literature, for display material, for the loan or purchase of films or for speakers to address a meeting. The number of requests has been increasing at both Headquarters and regional offices. Each must be personally answered. Such personal contacts are worth the time they take: a correspondent or a visitor who goes to trouble to get information will often pass it on to others.

Publications and Press

The first publication for the general public issued by WHO was a basic folder entitled *WHO, What it Is, What it Does, How it Works*, which contains the essential facts and figures on the structure, aims and work of WHO. In the last ten years there have been ten editions of the folder in English, French and Spanish. Single editions have been published in Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, German, Japanese, Urdu, Arabic, Russian, Hindi, Thai, Swahili, Chinese and Indonesian.

The periodical *World Health* (formerly the *WHO Newsletter*) was begun in 1949 as a simple mimeographed sheet, issued in a few thousand copies. Its form has been changed several times, and it now appears in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Portuguese) and it is estimated that each issue reaches some 91 000 readers.

In addition to information and news about WHO, *World Health* provides articles on a wide variety of health topics, often written by well-known authorities. Articles on matters of topical interest, such as accident prevention and Asian influenza, are often widely reproduced in other periodicals,

and special numbers on subjects like alcoholism and malaria control are frequently asked for in bulk by interested groups who pay the cost of the reprinting.

Press coverage may be supposed to reflect the public interest in any subject. During the ten years of WHO's existence journalists and editors have shown increasing interest in the Organization and its work, although, at first, there was a general tendency to confuse WHO with the Red Cross, UNRRA, and other international welfare organizations.

The changed attitude has probably been due in part to the gradual realization that WHO is a source of information on health matters that is in many ways unique: WHO statistical studies can provide comparative figures on general trends in mortality and morbidity from, for example, infectious diseases, cancer of various organs, accidents, alcoholism, and suicides, and on changes in health conditions as reflected in lowered infant and maternal morbidity. Decisions of the World Health Assembly, such as that which led to a world-wide campaign for malaria eradication, have been widely reported in the Press as important events in economic and social development.

The esteem in which WHO is held by the Press and the public depends on their recognition of the practical importance and utility of its work. The basic function of public information work is to make the facts easily available in an appropriate and acceptable form.

A time-honoured method of influencing the public through the Press is the issue of press-releases. Every day, a mass of mimeographed sheets from scores of organizations or groups appears on the desks of news-editors. To survive this intense competition, a release must not be too old (and it is no small problem to get some thousands of copies, in different languages, sent off promptly by post); it must have news-value; and as far as possible it must give the full story (attempts to evade an important issue or to stifle facts are quickly detected).

Provided that they fulfil these conditions, press-releases are one of the surest means of getting space in the daily and weekly press; they are also used by medical and nursing journals and other periodicals with a special interest in health matters, and, if not used immediately, they are often kept as background material. They may also prompt journalists to seek further information in writing, or by interview with the technical staff member concerned.

The press-release has its greatest effect when handed directly to the accredited press and agency correspondents who telegraph what they

consider most interesting to their headquarters for dissemination all over the world. The very wide distribution thus obtained generally outweighs the disadvantage that the brief telegraphed version may "kill" the full story when it arrives at the newspaper offices by post some days or weeks later.

Photographs, Posters and Illustrated Publications

Good photographs and attractive photo stories are welcomed by illustrated papers and magazines, and efforts have been made in recent years to collect and distribute material of this kind. In the earlier days of the Organization, photographs were often sent in by workers in field projects, but very few of these came up to the required technical standards. In 1951, the first professional photographic mission was sent out and the resulting photo stories roused so much interest that since then professional photographers have been used as often as possible.

This part of the work has grown rapidly since a photographic laboratory was installed at Headquarters and an effective distribution system has been developed. In 1957, for instance, nearly 30 000 prints were distributed to newspapers, magazines and other users.

A combination of text and photographs has been used to illustrate the work of WHO at different phases of its existence and to portray health progress in various parts of the world. The first booklet issued, entitled *The Lamp is Lit* (1951—35 000 copies in English, French and Spanish), concentrated mainly on the health problems which faced WHO during its early years. The second, *A Strategy for World Health* (1955—65 000 copies in English, French and Spanish), gave an account of some of the results achieved in the first seven years of WHO's existence. The third, entitled *Ten Steps Forward* (1957—90 000 copies in English, French and Spanish), was published to celebrate the Organization's tenth anniversary.

Publicity by exhibit can be costly, and experience has shown that, when financial resources are limited, expenditure is best concentrated on exhibit material that can be produced at reasonable cost and in fairly large quantities. It can then be used as part of a general information programme, combined with films, the distribution of printed material, etc.

Exhibits can also be used repeatedly for the information of specialized audiences; or they may be used on a much larger scale for a wider public. A good example of effective and large-scale use of exhibit material is the

United Nations Pavilion at the Brussels Universal Exhibition in 1958, where a WHO exhibit, put up at no cost to the Organization, will be seen by millions of visitors.

Posters constitute an allied form of publicity. Two attempts have been made to produce a WHO poster to symbolize international health work in a way understandable by people everywhere. Both were designed by poster artists of international repute, yet neither was an unqualified success. This experience shows that, to be effective and acceptable, posters must be produced on the spot and in the language and symbolism of the group for which they are intended.

Films and Television

A well-made film on a health subject may be depended upon to arouse interest. Even an inexpensive and unpretentious film such as *Somewhere in India*, produced by WHO in 1952, is still shown and appreciated year after year. The film on treponematoses, *We Have the Cure*, made in 1956 essentially for technical audiences, was found to have a general appeal as well and there has been a brisk sale of prints, partly for direct projection and partly for television.

The short films that have been produced by the Organization have been designed for the dual purpose of public information and instruction of field and other professional workers.

The UNESCO film, *World without End*, which dealt partly with work against yaws, has elicited many donations for the work of WHO and of UNICEF.

Film production is always more costly than the outsider is willing to believe; but the high cost is often justified by the vivid, intimate and frequently lasting impression that a good film goes on making, year after year, on audience after audience.

A crucial problem is how to ensure wide distribution of the films made by WHO. The United Nations, which is the largest film producer of the United Nations group of organizations, puts its distribution facilities at the disposal of the specialized agencies. Other outlets are through the regional offices of WHO, and a number of non-governmental organizations. Occasionally, national film boards will accept a WHO film for distribution in commercial cinemas as part of the "official quota" but, no matter how good they may be, films of this kind are generally classed as "institutional" and

it is extremely difficult to get regular commercial distribution for films so labelled.

The rapid development of television in recent years has appreciably changed this situation. To keep up with the increasing demand, television producers are always on the lookout for suitable fresh material, and have shown a growing interest in films on health subjects.

For example, a television programme about nurses produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation for World Health Day, 1954, and another on virus diseases made the same year, obtained what the BBC considered a high rating of "viewer response".

To provide film material on health subjects designed specifically for use in television is probably, at the present time, the investment that will pay the highest dividends in numbers reached and response aroused.

A film enterprise unique of its kind was the animated cartoon on alcoholism, produced in colour in 1956. This film, entitled *To Your Health*, makes no mention of WHO, but aims exclusively at presenting the problem of alcoholism in a way that will engage the interest of the general public and enlarge popular understanding of the alcoholic's behaviour. It has been well received by the people most closely concerned with this problem in many countries, and over three hundred prints in English and French were sold within twelve months of its release. German and Swedish versions have been produced by private organizations, at their own expense. It seems likely that the demand for this film will continue for many years.

The most ambitious film yet produced by the Organization was made in 1957, in readiness for the tenth anniversary in 1958. It was produced by one of the leading makers of documentary films, and it attempts to convey in fifty minutes a lasting impression of the significance of international health work, by combining three short and vivid stories from Asia, Africa, and South America. This film is expected to be widely shown, on television and cinema screens, during and after the tenth anniversary celebrations.

Radio

Despite the rapid growth of television, sound radio still has large audiences in most countries for both national and internationally beamed short-wave services, and it is likely to remain for many years an important channel for information work.

The programmes that have been found most interesting to radio listeners have been those connected with the annual World Health Assemblies, meetings of expert committees and study groups, and feature programmes on field projects and the treatment of specific diseases, and World Health Day. Material for radio programmes may take such forms as news items, talks and commentaries by Assembly delegates, members of expert committees and field staff, round-table conferences, and recordings of the Director-General's World Health Day message. His message in 1957 was used in thirty-six programmes.

The material which WHO provides is often designed rather to assist the production, on national networks, of radio programmes dealing with health subjects, than to serve as feature programmes ready for broadcasting. This applies particularly to subjects of general interest. Recently the material distributed by WHO on atomic radiation, heart disease, and various aspects of mental health such as the psychobiological development of the child, maternal deprivation, and so on, has been used as a basis for feature programmes. Material has also been collected for dramatized radio features for broadcast by the United Nations and by national networks.

The largest single outlet for WHO material has been the Radio Division of the United Nations, which has built up a distribution network that covers the whole world; but a considerable amount of material is also recorded on tape and sent direct to national broadcasting organizations. Very often, too, national networks are assisted in the production of programmes on health subjects of their choice, some of which are intended for broadcast to schools.

Outside Information Work and Joint Missions

So far, this account has dealt principally with ways of bringing to public notice information originating within the Organization, on a broad range of health subjects.

However objectively such material is presented, it is always open to the charge of having been prepared with some intention of propaganda for the Organization. There is no doubt that articles, radio programmes and films dealing with health subjects and health work, but coming from sources independent of the Organization, obtain a readier welcome and carry greater conviction.

WHO has therefore frequently invited authors, journalists, science writers and film producers to visit Headquarters, regional offices and field projects for varying periods, to collect at first hand material which they afterwards use freely for books, articles, films or broadcasts.

This policy has produced good results, including the commercial publication of a best seller for teen-agers, *Mankind against the Killers*. The success of independently-produced television programmes has already been mentioned.

Several first-class films dealing wholly or in part with health subjects have been produced by commercial firms. In such cases WHO has usually been consulted from the planning stage onwards, and the producers have had the co-operation of WHO technical and field workers in the actual making of the film. An outstanding example is the film, *The Rival World*, which contains several sections dealing with the world-wide fight against insect carriers of disease.

Another way in which WHO has tried to facilitate independent testimony of this kind has been through the joint sponsoring of information missions. The first of these was in 1951, when arrangements were made for a well-known science writer, a professional photographer and a radio producer to visit health projects in several countries in Asia. The mission was sponsored jointly by several United Nations bodies, but the essential condition was that the information material produced should be the work of independent witnesses.

This mission resulted in articles and booklets which were used and reproduced in several countries, for years afterwards. A book written by the science writer of the team was published commercially. The radio material collected during the trip yielded three one-hour programmes in English and in several other languages; and the photographs are still an important part of the Organization's photo library.

Other missions of the same type were arranged subsequently, but with varying success. For instance, it was often difficult to reconcile the rather different needs of the participating agencies, and missions sponsored by too many organizations were not entirely satisfactory. There was also some evidence that teams of workers in various media, working at a different pace and with different techniques, were less successful than individuals working alone or teams specialized in the same medium.

Experience has shown that some of the defects of this method can be corrected and, in spite of its limitations, it has proved to be particularly suited to the telling of the story of international health work.

World Health Day

The First World Health Assembly decided that the Organization should sponsor an annual World Health Day, which the following Assembly agreed should be observed on 7 April, the anniversary of the day on which the Constitution of WHO officially came into force in 1948. Since 1950 a special theme has been selected for World Health Day each year and background information on that theme has been prepared and distributed to Member governments.

The success of World Health Day has probably been due in part to WHO's policy of encouraging each participating country to observe the occasion in the way best suited to the national health effort. The aim has been, not to glorify the Organization, but to focus attention on health problems of interest to most countries of the world.

Some of the subjects which have aroused the best response have been *Health for your Child and the World's Children* (1951), *Health is Wealth* (1953), *The Nurse, Pioneer of Health* (1954) and *The Insect-borne Diseases* (1956).

Co-operation with Other Organizations

As in other branches of the Organization's work, it is most important to cultivate effective working relationships with the United Nations and the other specialized agencies. Some aspects of the co-operation offered by the United Nations Department of Public Information and by UNESCO have already been mentioned in connexion with films and radio. But this co-operation extends to many other branches of information work. In particular, United Nations Information Centres throughout the world have been very useful as distribution points for information on WHO.

Through the Consultative Committee for Public Information and the United Nations Film Board, the United Nations and the specialized agencies are able to discuss policy and planning on common information problems. Examples of inter-agency co-operation have been the joint information missions mentioned earlier, the joint sponsorship by FAO and WHO of World Health Day in 1957, the theme of which was *Food and Health*, and the frequent use by the UNESCO *Courier* of articles on health subjects.

Although working relationships are making progress, through the existing co-ordination machinery, more systematic joint planning and production of information material would produce even better results, particularly in expensive media such as films and television.

Future Development

From the public information work of the last ten years, certain conclusions may be drawn that are important for the future.

A first general conclusion is that, to produce the widest effect with the limited resources available, it is necessary to experiment continually with new methods and to re-examine critically old methods consecrated by usage. Information material issued by or in co-operation with WHO often deals with technical subjects and it must be treated in ways that combine technical accuracy with a presentation sufficiently attractive to engage and hold the interest of the general public.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the ten years' experience is that the production and distribution of routine types of information by the Organization, although essential, is not sufficient in itself. There is a growing number of writers, journalists, and radio, film and television producers who realize the popular appeal of health subjects and whose independent accounts of the Organization's work can be more convincing than official statements. This type of activity, however, involves active co-operation from WHO itself, which supplies the necessary background and technical information. This may be done in many ways: for film or television production, WHO may provide ready-made material showing different aspects of its field work. Sometimes WHO information officers accompany a writer, photographer or producer who is making an expedition to get his own material at first hand. Similar work will probably soon be done from the regional offices, and will have to be combined with effective distribution of material within each region and a general development of the regional information work.

A final point is the possibility, both at Headquarters and in the regions, of enlisting the co-operation of governments and of non-governmental organizations in the collection and distribution of information.

The WHO National Committees in a number of countries do valuable work in disseminating information, organizing World Health Day observance, holding seminars on health topics, etc. The World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) and its affiliated national associations each year organize study groups on health and social questions.

Many governments now observe World Health Day each year and a certain number have already made liaison with WHO's regional information units. It is true that up to the present national information services have only occasionally been able to spend their own money on the translation or adaptation

and reproduction of WHO leaflets, booklets or visual media. There are good grounds for hoping, however, that, as peoples everywhere become more aware of the significance and value of international health work and of their countries' share in it, national information services will increasingly produce and distribute, on their own initiative, information about WHO.
