WHO's normative work

Department of Quality Assurance, Norms and Standards

Definitions

The World Health Organization (WHO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, was established in 1948 when its Constitution came into force.[1] WHO's objective, as stated in Article 1 of its Constitution, is "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health".[2] In recognizing the unique and constant mandate of the Organization, and in keeping with the spirit of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth General Programme of Work, the following definitions are advanced:

- **WHO normative work[3]**

  o WHO normative work or "norms, standards and conventions" is used here to denote a wide range of WHO's work that is informed by country needs, but that benefits countries (and partner organizations) collectively rather than individually. This range includes producing global health trend assessments, prequalification of medicines and vaccines, treatment protocols and legal instruments such as the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. These elements are not all "normative" in the strict sense of the word, but the term is used here as a shorthand to describe these aspects of WHO's work. The activities concerned are, for the most part, consistent with the economic definition of global or regional public goods. However, the term "global or regional public goods" is not widely used in WHO and therefore is not used here.[4]

- **WHO public health goods[5]**

  o WHO public health are products and services uniquely delivered by WHO for the benefit of all countries, that are essential to achieve the GPW13 Triple billion targets, wit the following three strategic shifts:
    1. Leadership functions
    2. Technical Products on norms/standards, data and research (formerly Global Public Health Goods)
    3. Country support

- **Technical Products[6]**

  o Technical products on norms/standards, data and research are applicable to multiple countries and developed using rigorous processes at global, regional and country level to drive impact. These belong to the following area:
    1. **Norms and standards**: Products that tell the end-user what to do or how to perform an action. These products can be primarily technical or scientific in nature, or they can be based on legal or ethics frameworks or conventions. Standard-setting products: (i) indicate categories or labels; (ii) set thresholds or standards along a continuous measure; or (iii) provide an assessment based on a threshold or standard.
    2. **Data**: Products developed by WHO that are for the benefit of all regions and countries to strengthen country data and information systems for health; to monitor population health trends, inequalities, and to use data to deliver impact in countries. The five categories of data products are: (i) standards and classifications, (ii) data collection tools, (iii) databases and data exchange platforms, (iv) global reports, and (v) delivery for impact.
    3. **Research, innovation and horizon scanning**: Products that advance scientific knowledge and the development of new technologies ranging from guidance on best practices for research implementation and use, to analyses to support the evidence-based local or global research and innovation agenda.

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[1] History of WHO. Geneva: World Health Organization (History (who.int), accessed 22 February 2024).

[2] Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, 1946. New York: World Health Organization; 1946 (Constitution of the World Health Organization (who.int), accessed 22 February 2024).

[3] Resolution EB130/5 Add.1 in the 130th session of the WHO Executive Board in 2012 (https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB130/B130_5Add1-en.pdf, accessed 12 March 2024).

[4] The Organization subsequently defined "WHO Public Health Goods" in 2021. See next definition.

[5] WHO Public Health Goods: Technical Products on norms/standards, data and research. Guide in alignment with PB22-23 (Technical Products on norms/standards, data and research - WHOPublicHealthGoods_TP Guide_May2021.pdf - All Documents (sharepoint.com), accessed 12 March 2024).

[6] Ibid.