The United Nations Conference on **Sustainable Development** (Rio+20) has adopted a series of **measures** that have the potential to contribute to a more **equitable**, **cleaner**, **greener**, and more **prosperous world** – and recognizes the important **linkages between health** and **development**.

"The Future We Want" conference outcome document, agreed upon by member states attending the 20-22 June conference, highlights the fact that better health is a “precondition for, an outcome of, and an indicator of sustainable development”.

“This focus on the links between health and sustainable development is critical,” said Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization WHO. “Healthy people are better able to learn, be productive and contribute to their communities. At the same time, a healthy environment is a prerequisite for good health.”

The outcome document also emphasizes the importance of universal health coverage to enhancing health, social cohesion and sustainable human and economic development. And it acknowledges that the global burden and threat of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) constitutes one of the major sustainable development challenges of the 21st century.

The document states: “We are convinced that action on the social and environmental determinants of health, both for the poor and the vulnerable and the entire population, is important to create inclusive, equitable, economically productive and healthy societies. We call for the full realization of the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of

physical and mental health".

Health-related development issues covered in detail in the outcome document include:

- Access to better energy services including sustainable cooking and heating solutions, which can significantly reduce childhood pneumonia and adult cardiopulmonary disease deaths from indoor air pollution;

- Greater focus on urban planning measures including more sustainable, energy-efficient housing and transport – which can significantly reduce many NCD risks, e.g. cardiopulmonary diseases from air pollution, health risks from physical inactivity and traffic injury;

- Better sanitation in cities and villages to protect against the spread of communicable diseases;

- Sustainable food systems that combat hunger and contribute to better health and nutrition;

- More sustainable water usage, meeting basic needs for safe drinking-water and stewardship of water supplies to grow food;

- Assurance that all jobs and workplaces meet minimum safety and health standards to reduce cancer, chronic lung diseases, injuries and early deaths.

Rio+20 also underlined the vital need for universal health coverage (including policies to prevent, protect and promote public health). Currently, 150 million people worldwide suffer severe financial hardship each year because they fall ill and cannot afford to pay for the services or medicines they need to recover. Universal health coverage can therefore fight poverty and build more resilient and prosperous communities.

An outcome of the 1992 Rio Conference (The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development) was Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan for global and local action.

Chapter Six of this document focused on 'Protecting and Promoting Human Health'. Over the past 20 years, WHO has worked in the five areas outlined in that chapter: meeting primary health care needs particularly in rural areas; control of communicable diseases; protecting vulnerable groups; meeting the urban health challenge; and reducing environmental health risks, which are often exacerbated by unsustainable development. The Organization will continue this work and scale up efforts to help countries aiming to achieve universal health coverage and prevent and treat noncommunicable diseases.

Read "The Future We Want" conference outcome document: http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html