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Data Bases for Mortality Measurement

Papers of the Meeting of the United Nations/
World Health Organization Working Group
on Data Bases for Measurement of Levels,
Trends and Differentials in Mortality

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NOTE

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The designations "developed" and "developing" economies are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process.

The views expressed in signed papers are those of the individual authors and do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

Papers have been edited and consolidated in accordance with United Nations practice and requirements.

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PREFACE

The continuing co-operative programme of mortality studies undertaken by the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) strives not only to improve knowledge of recent levels and trends in mortality but, by carrying out small-area case studies and by analysing social and economic correlates of mortality patterns, to improve understanding of the factors that affect the mortality spectrum throughout the developing countries. The aim of the programme is to improve the ability of countries to incorporate health considerations into their development planning and to improve the health and mortality situation of their populations.

Although an enormous number of questions about levels, trends and determinants of mortality remain unanswered, the subject has failed, in the past several decades, to arouse the interest of donor agencies or of developed countries. Developing countries themselves have given low priority to health in their national planning. Currently, overall health expenditures in most developing countries amount to less than 2 per cent of the national product. Furthermore, the greatest portion of these public expenditures is for curative medicine, which reaches only a narrow segment of the population.

The lack of a sound statistical basis on which to judge current mortality conditions and to evaluate the effect of current health programmes is prominent among the reasons for the insufficient progress in improving health and survival. The most elementary data on mortality are missing; those data available are not of a quantity, breadth or quality sufficient to provide government planners with needed information on the levels, trends, structure and differentials in mortality, or to provide the necessary background for ini-

tiating or evaluating programmes relating to health and mortality.

As part of the joint programme, the Population Division of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, in cooperation with the Statistical Office of the Department and the World Health Organization, with the financial support of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), organized a Working Group on Data Bases for Measurement of Levels, Trends and Differentials in Mortality. The purpose of the inter-regional meeting of the Working Group, which was held at Bangkok, Thailand, from 20 to 23 October 1981, was to discuss experiences by various government and national institutions in collecting, analysing and using mortality data relevant to the setting of policies in the health and development sectors of their countries. The members of the Working Group were representatives of national statistical offices, national health services and non-governmental institutions involved in the collection, analysis and use of mortality data.

The report of the meeting, including the recommendations of the Working Group for future action at national and international levels, constitutes part one of the present publication. The subsequent parts are devoted to papers that were selected from the commissioned papers and country statements discussed by the Working Group and that were revised after the meeting.

Grateful acknowledgement is due to Kenneth Hill of the United States National Academy of Sciences, who graciously consented to serve as scientific editor for the publication on behalf of the United Nations Secretariat and WHO, and to UNFPA, which made possible the present publication through its grant for mortality studies (INT/80/PO9).

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Explanatory notes

The following symbols have been used in the tables throughout this publication:

Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported.

An em dash (—) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible.

A hyphen (-) indicates that the item is not applicable.

Parentheses () indicate a deficit or decrease, except as otherwise indicated.

A point (.) is used in English to indicate decimals.

A slash (/) indicates a crop year or financial year, e.g., 1980/81.

Use of a hyphen (-) between dates representing years, e.g., 1981-1983, signifies the full period involved, including the beginning and end years.

Details and percentages in tables do not necessarily add to totals, because of rounding.

Reference to "dollars" (\$) indicates United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

Reference to "billion" indicates a thousand million.