

I. DISCUSSION OF AGENDA TOPICS

The participants at the Meeting discussed the usefulness of mortality data and took note of its value as a measure of the quality of life and its necessity for evaluation of the impact of governmental and non-governmental interventions in the health and development sectors of the society. The type of data, the extent of data and the quality of data needed depended upon the way in which the data were to be used: when a data-collection activity was being considered, attention must be paid to its ultimate purpose. Use, however, should not be considered in its narrow sense in relation to a given specific project. It might very well be that, through discussion with other agencies and offices, the data could have a broader use, costs could be shared and benefits could be more than proportionally increased. In the same way, prior to initiation of a data-collection activity, researchers should investigate what data might have been collected in the preceding periods or should ascertain the existence of currently ongoing data-collection systems. Through innovative methods of data exploration, evaluation and adjustment, existing data sets, even if deficient, might find new uses.

The participants considered that methods of data collection could be subdivided into several categories: vital registration systems; *ad hoc* or continuous surveys; special questions in quinquennial or decennial

censuses; or special and intensive mortality/health studies. They then discussed those various procedures and took note of the advantages and disadvantages of each in terms of cost, ease of collection, quality of results, type of data acquired, analysis possibilities and methods of evaluation.

A general conclusion of the participants was that for the determination of long-term mortality trends for subnational areas, special population groups or special age/sex combinations, a vital registration was of paramount importance and that all countries should be encouraged to initiate such a system or to enhance their current systems. In the meantime, however, a system of regular surveys was necessary. Even with the existence of a strong registration system, regular surveys might still be necessary for the study of the correlates of mortality and health trends and the efficient setting of health policies. For evaluation of the effect of health policies or specific intervention programmes, some types of intensive surveys in small areas were recommended.

In general, the Working Group believed that the appropriate data-collection system depended upon the needs and resources of the country and that each country should carefully evaluate its needs and resources before it embarked on a data-collection procedure.