

Economic and Social Council

Addressing the socioeconomic challenges in areas where epidemic diseases are prevalent

Description of the problem:

Epidemics are always a risk and an aggravation for the socioeconomic situation of a country. Although there is a risk for More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs), the risk caused by epidemics to Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) is much higher.

Even without epidemics worsening the social and economic situations, LEDCs are struggling to strengthen their situation in the global community. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) approximately 17.6 million people in low- and middle-income countries die each year from diseases and maternal conditions. These rates are much lower in developed countries because of better their living standards, medical supply as well as different climate and environmental factors.

Examples of socioeconomic challenges in areas where epidemic diseases are prevalent are the discrimination of those who are infected, a lack of qualified personnel, a lack of work force, struggle towards shouldering the responsibilities accruing and a decreased life expectancy.



Definition of Key terms:

LEDC Less Economically Developed Country stands for a country, which has low economic and living standards. According to the World Bank, a country with a GNI below USD 11.905 per capita is considered a LEDC.

MEDC More Economically Developed Country stands for a country with high economic and living standards. The GDP is for example one factor included in the criteria for being considered an MEDC.

Epidemic An epidemic is an infection, which spreads fast and widely across one certain area. An epidemic disease can become a pandemic when the infection shows up at several places around the world at the same time.

Socioeconomic challenges

Socioeconomic challenges are problems accruing not only in the sector of social aspects, which affect the population and the society, but also the countries' economy.

General information concerning the problems:

Lack of medical supply:

Today we know ways of combating epidemic diseases and we are also able to slow down the spread of such diseases. But this knowledge can't help everyone. Most LEDCs are not able to pay for example the costs for inoculations or the medicaments needed to treat the diseases. The medical centres, if they exist at all, are mostly not hygienic enough, and due to this, the diseases are spread throughout the population. This happens for example through needles, which haven't been disinfected properly.

Lack of awareness:

One of the most frequent epidemic diseases is HIV/Aids. The Sub-Saharan region has for example only 10 per cent of the worlds' population, but is with more than 75 per cent of Aids-related deaths the most HIV/Aids affected region. The lack of awareness in the LEDCs' populations leads to a further spread of the disease. Aids is often carried on through sexual contact, and the lack of awareness of precautions like for example condoms is prevalent.

Church and religion:

Several LEDCs, especially in Africa and South America, are influenced by the Catholic Church that proscribes the use of condoms and birth controls. Especially the use of condoms is essential to minimize the spread of Aids. On the other hand, the sexual behaviour (promiscuity – having sex with relatively many partners) is counterproductive to an efficient fight against Aids.

Natural disasters:

Natural disasters often cause epidemics. Malaria outbreaks in the wake of flooding are a well-known phenomenon. Access to safe water can be jeopardized by a natural disaster and many illnesses occur after the contamination of drinking water, such as typhus, diarrheal diseases, Hepatitis A and E, Leptospirosis, Dengue, and tetanus.

Economic challenges:

An infection with epidemic diseases is possible in every sector of the population, which means that also many of the better-educated people can be infected. In consideration of this fact, we also have to bear in mind that such people often are the most active ones in the financial, economic or social sectors of a country. An outfall of such high-qualified personnel would mean a reduction in for example labour productivity, the savings, which are necessary for capital investment in agriculture, industry and other sectors, loss of production and loss of income. Added to this: not many countries are able to react with inoculations in cases of extremely dangerous epidemics.

Social challenges:

Epidemic diseases are worsening the already existing social challenges to each country affected. Workers who are infected and thus not able to work any more, can't supply their families. This can often result in children having to work in order to earn money for their families. But in that way they can't be educated properly even if they might have the possibility of education in their respective country. The community has to shoulder the burden of taking care of those who are infected. That means a big responsibility for everyone. Some people might not be able to cope with this situation, which might later lead to depressions, self-reproaches or other mental disorders. Life expectancy is reduced rapidly in regions where epidemic diseases are prevalent. Furthermore, child mortality is expected to double by 2010.

Taking all these facts into consideration, diseases mean a cumulative loss of human resources, a decrease in capacity for development, and an ever-deepening personal and social distress.

Timeline of Key Events:

7 th April 1948	Establishment of the World Health Organisation (WHO)
1965	Establishment of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
2000	Adoption of the United Nations Millennium Goal Declaration
2001	Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on HIV/Aids
2005	Establishment of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

Relevant treaties, UN resolutions and actions taken:

- *Paper on the socioeconomic effects of HIV/Aids in Africa released of the United Nations Development Programme (March 1999)*
- *UNDP releases issues paper No. 31 on the Socio-Economic Causes and Consequences of the HIV Epidemic in Southern Africa: a case study of Namibia*
- *United Millennium Declaration (18 September 2000, A/55/L.2)*
- *UN resolution on the combat of widespread disease (19 September 1997, A/Res/S-19/2)*
- *United Nations General Assembly Political Declaration on HIV/Aids*
- *General Assembly resolution on Decade Roll Back Malaria in Developing Countries, especially Africa (2009, A/Res/64/79)*
- *General Assembly resolution on Global Health and Foreign Policy (2009, A/Res/64/108)*

Parties involved:

The UN is also striving to help regions and countries (such as for instance Africa, Asia, India, Egypt) affected by epidemics and pandemics by working closely with the World Health Organisation (**WHO**) and other organisations such as United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees (**UNHCR**), The United Nations Children's Fund (**UNICEF**), World Food Programme (**WFP**), United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**), United Nations Population Fund (**UNFPA**), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (**UNODC**), International Labor Organisation (**ILO**), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (**UNESCO**) and the World Bank.

Useful Sources and Links:

United Nations Millennium Declaration:

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>

Paper on the socioeconomic effects of HIV/Aids in Africa released of the United Nations Development Programme:

http://www.undp.org/hiv/publications/facil_bk/BACKGROUND.htm

On the Socioeconomic Impact of the HIV/Aids Epidemic: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2695149>

UNDP releases issues paper No. 31 on the Socio-Economic Causes and Consequences of the HIV Epidemic in Southern Africa: a case study of Namibia:

<http://www.undp.org/hiv/publications/issues/english/issue31e.htm>

WHO Epidemiology: <http://www.who.int/topics/epidemiology/en/>

Cost-Effective Strategies for the Excess Burden of Disease in Developing Countries:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/bookshelf/br.fcgi?book=pih&part=A125>

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV / AIDS:

<http://www.unaids.org/en/>

Socioeconomic Challenges in Asia:

http://www.thaiworld.org/upload/question/file_826.pdf

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control:

<http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/Pages/home.aspx>

Epidemics after natural disasters:

http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/550435_5

List of Epidemics:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_epidemics