

What do we know about Environmental Health Research in South Africa?

17 August 2009

11h00-11h25



Outline

- South African Health Review, 2008
(Health Systems Trust)
 - Developments in environmental health
- Who's who in environmental health research in South Africa?
- What research has been done in South Africa?
- Conclusions

South African Health Review, 2008

- South Africa needs to address:
 - Traditional, modern & emerging environmental health issues
 - Traditional – related to basic needs
 - Modern – e.g. air & water pollution
 - Emerging – climate change, sustainability
- Concerns include rapid urbanisation, climate change, globalisation, air pollution, poverty, food insecurity & inequity

South African Health Review, 2008

- Focus on developments in environmental health services
- Review of main environmental health components
 - Water & sanitation
 - Food control
 - Malaria control
- Human resources in environmental health

South African Health Review, 2008

Water & sanitation

- Access to basic water infrastructure coverage improved from 59% (1994) to 94% (2007)
- Concern for water quality
- Focus on community participation in sanitation implementation
- Slow improvements in sanitation service provision
- Low hygiene awareness

South African Health Review, 2008

Malaria control

- Sustained decrease in number of nationally reported malaria cases & deaths between 2001 & 2007
- Historically areas of concern were Mpumalanga & Northern KZN
- Today mainly in low altitude border areas of Limpopo, Mpumalanga & North-East KZN
- Case fatality rate in 2007, 0.9% (target 0.5%)
- Success to date a result of effective vector control, good case management & sustained political & financial support
- Further control will only be achieved through inter-country collaboration

Who's who in environmental health research in South Africa?

- MRC Environment & Health Research Unit
- National Institute for Occupational Health
- CSIR Environmental Health Research Group, Water Ecosystems & Human Health, & other CSIR research groups
- HSRC
- University departments

Environmental Health Research in South Africa

Water & human health research

- Water quality & human health
- Detection methods & situation analyses to assess pathogen presence in water for drinking, irrigation & recreation
- Human health risk assessment for microbes, chemicals & endocrine disruptors

Environmental Health Research in South Africa

- Lead poisoning
- Exposure to persistent toxic substances
- Chemicals in the environment, e.g. mercury exposure
- Community nutrition
- MRC / WHO Health Environment & Development (HEAD) study

Conclusions

- Much research has been done in environmental health
- Difficult to know what has been done
- Issues of concern raised in the South African Health Review may not be all inclusive
- We don't know what research we should be doing because, for example, we don't know what the baseline is