Major Conclusions and Recommendations

The WHO International Meeting on Epidemiology of Leprosy in relation to Control reviewed the state-of-the-art of epidemiology and discussed issues relevant to leprosy control, particularly in terms of changing needs following the widespread implementation of multidrug therapy (MDT) and the declining trends in prevalence of the disease. The following are the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting.

1 The need for rapid assessment of the leprosy prevalence situation, particularly before introducing MDT, was recognized. As sample surveys are not feasible in most situations other methods of estimating prevalence through application of extrapolation factors were considered suitable.

2 The need for making predictions for the future trends was recognized for the purpose of planning, including resource mobilization, evaluation and research. It was recommended that methods for prediction of trends, including simulation models, should be further developed through a multidisciplinary effort and by making optimal use of existing epidemiological data sets.

3 The leprosy evaluation indicators developed at earlier WHO meetings were reviewed and six essential indicators were recommended for routine programmes. Optional indicators were also recommended for more developed control programmes.

4 The meeting identified some of the more important research areas in epidemiology of leprosy including risk factor studies for the disease and leprosy-related disabilities, the influence of HIV infection in leprosy, cost-effectiveness of different vaccine and therapy strategies, and correlates for protective effect of vaccines.

5 In view of the leprosy elimination goal adopted by the World Health Assembly and the rapidly changing situation the meeting strongly recommended strengthening of epidemiological capabilities of leprosy control programmes. It also recommended that problems at the operational level of leprosy control should be solved through systematic approaches such as health system research.