

A composite index measuring the performance of health systems

In a bold new initiative the World Health Organization has developed a composite index measuring the performance of health systems in 191 countries. According to *World Health Report 2000* (WHO 2000b), even without new medical technologies important advances can be made in health outcomes—just by improving the way currently available health interventions are organized and delivered. Differences in health outcomes between countries often reflect differences in the performance of their health systems. And differences in outcomes among groups within countries can often be attributed to disparities in the health services available to them.

A notable feature of the composite index is that it summarizes performance in terms of both the over-

all level of goal achievement and the distribution of that achievement, giving equal weight to these two aspects. Five components make up the index: overall good health, distribution of good health, overall responsiveness, distribution of responsiveness and fairness in financial contributions. Good health is measured by disability-adjusted life expectancy, and the distribution of good health by an equality of child survival index. The overall responsiveness of the health system and the distribution of responsiveness are measured on the basis of survey responses relating to respect for patients and client orientation. And fairness in financial contributions is estimated using the ratio of households' total spending on health to their permanent income above subsistence.