

The Central Role of Health in the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

Not many issues are as emotive and as fundamentally cross-cutting as people's health. Health is viewed as both an enabler for sustainable development as well as an end in itself. This paper will highlight how and why health must be more present, more integral, and more influential in the post-2015 era than it has been in the past 15 years.

'Health' is explicitly included as the third goal among the 17 proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet health is also inextricably linked to the other 16 SDGs, each of which enable or is enabled by advances in population health. Despite a broad agenda and steep competition for attention, 'health' must remain a prominent and vital component of the development agenda, despite the consolidation of three health goals under the Millennium Development Goals (numbers 4, 5, and 6) into just one SDG (number 3).

Key factors to consider:

- 1. Health underpins every development theme and SDG.** Health is directly and indirectly intertwined with goals such as education, economic growth, infrastructure, climate change, finance and governance, and means of implementation.
- 2. Health must be recognized as a contributor to development, as well as a beneficiary.** Meeting education, environment, and food security goals will favorably enhance the health of individuals and communities, and healthy individuals and communities in turn advance favorable outcomes for other goals.
- 3. The Health goal and its targets should be global.** Health targets falling directly under Goal #3, including access to essential medicines and universal health coverage, are highly relevant to both developing and developed countries.
- 4. The private sector must play an integral role in advancing the Health goal.** From delivery of health services to products and public education, to choices about how to support the health of employees, the private sector plays a pivotal role – often in partnership with governments and civil society – in ensuring a sustainable model and framework for health in any country. Many 'universal' health coverage models include a private sector element.

Private Sector Call to Action

Small, medium, and large multinational companies are both beneficiaries and contributors to the health of their employees, their families, their communities and the broader society. By driving economic growth, investing in infrastructure, agriculture, energy, etc., the private sector is one of the many threads that will hold the SDGs together as they envelop the post-2015 agenda.

The private sector must play a leading role in the translation of not only the 'health' goal, but of all the relevant goals, into concrete actions and measured outcomes. Companies operating in the health sector may have more easily identifiable contributions to 'health' than non-health related organizations. However, health companies must also strive to demonstrate that all companies, no matter what products or services they provide, can contribute to 'health' by marshalling their innovative capabilities and thus consider themselves part of the collective solution.

All companies must embrace the full scope of the SDGs, ultimately establish goals and key performance indicators against as many of the SDGs as possible, assess their impact, and report the outcomes externally.

Table: The link between Health and the Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goals	Connection to Healthcare
1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere	Good health supports economic growth and reduces poverty. World Bank President Jim Kim clearly identified the link between the Health goal, economic growth and sustainable development: “To free the world from absolute poverty by 2030, countries must ensure that all of their citizens have access to quality, affordable health services.” ¹ Poor health may reduce an individual’s ability to work and generate income or to invest in education. Governments and industry are exploring many innovative access models to support better access to healthcare services and products. These models can help prevent economic hardship among families which need to pay out of pocket for catastrophic health costs. In cases where the cost of healthcare rests largely with individuals, (rather than government or insurance), the financial burden may increase rates of poverty.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and adequate nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture	Prevention, including a healthy and well-balanced diet, is pivotal to avoiding disease, worsening of health-related conditions and hospitalization. Poverty, hunger, and lack of food security may result in unhealthy food choices and greater incidence of food-related disease burden. Close to 850 million people worldwide still suffer from chronic hunger. According to the FAO, hunger and under-nutrition reduce global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2–3 percent, equivalent to US\$1.4–2.1 trillion a year. ²
3. Attain healthy lives for all at all ages	The Lancet Commission on Investing in Health estimates that about 24% of growth in “full income” from 2000-2011 in low and middle income countries resulted from health improvements. ³ The Health Goal must address the entire course of life, in a holistic approach focused on key elements: (1) universal health-care coverage; (2) accelerating progress on the unfinished health MDG agenda; (3) reducing the burden of Non-Communicable Diseases. Recent analysis suggests that investments in certain areas of health could prove cost effective, for example providing widespread contraception, and reducing malaria and tuberculosis. ⁴
4. Provide inclusive and equitable quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all	Good health is vital to ensure children and adults attend school and learn. Learning achievement affects one’s ability to access decent work, combat disease, participate in society and raise healthy families. A child born to a mother who can read stands a 50% greater chance of surviving past age five. ⁵
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls everywhere	Gender plays a significant role in the health of individuals, families, and communities. Women are the main health decision makers in the majority of family units and communities. They manage the resources allocated to caring for family members’ health needs, and their empowerment is vital to optimal health decision making. Gender also plays a significant role in timing and spacing of pregnancies, which impacts maternal and child health.

¹ World Bank President Jim Yong Kim’s speech at the World Health Assembly, May 21, 2013.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2013/05/21/world-bank-group-president-jim-yong-kim-speech-at-world-health-assembly>

² ICN2 Second International Conference on Nutrition, Nov. 19-21, 2014, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,

<http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/icn2/toolkit/hunger-facts/en/>

³ Global health 2035: a world converging within a generation, Dec. 3, 2013., Dean T Jamison, et. al., *The Lancet*, Vol. 382, No. 9908, p1898–1955;

<http://www.thelancet.com/commissions/global-health-2035>;

<http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Global%20health%202035%20-%20a%20world%20converging%20within%20a%20generation.pdf>

⁴ The Economics of Optimism, *The Economist*, January 24, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21640361-debate-heats-up-about-what-goals-world-should-set-itself-2030>

⁵ UNICEF, Recommitting to Child Survival, A Promise Renewed, p. 6. http://www.unicef.org/esaro/Child_survival_a_promise_renewed.pdf

6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	Poor sanitation is a critical cause of disease, including diarrhea, hepatitis, etc. It also hinders effective health interventions, e.g. when medicines must be dissolved in water for children. In 2012, 748 million people lacked access to safe drinking-water. ⁶
7. Ensure access to affordable, sustainable, and modern energy for all	Access to sustainable energy sources is vital to good health. Reliable energy is critical to support health facilities, power medical equipment, and store critical medicines and vaccines. Lack of access in the home negatively impacts health status. In 2010, 1.2 billion people globally lacked access to electricity and an estimated 2.6 billion people did not have access to clean cooking facilities. ⁷ Household indoor air pollution will lead to 1.5 million deaths per year by 2030, ⁸ mostly women, girls and boys under age 5.
8. Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all	According to the WHO, healthy populations live longer, are more productive, and save greater resources. ⁹ Some studies maintain that a healthy workforce loses less time from work and are more productive when working, and a healthy workforce can increase incentives for business investment. ¹⁰ Full and productive employment may provide opportunities for employer-supported health coverage, clinics, or awareness campaigns. Steady family income helps facilitate access to health services.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation	Investing in local research and development, or manufacturing capacity for health related products and services helps drive economic growth, and may enhance affordability of health products. Healthcare infrastructure is part of a country's resilient infrastructure, next to logistics, utility, ICT and soft-infrastructure (e.g. policies that promote indigenous innovation). Improved transport and ICT infrastructure are also enablers to improve access to healthcare.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries	Decreasing inequality can be advanced by establishing social protection floors. Increasing access to quality health care through multi-payer universal health coverage is one way to help maintain a healthy and productive workforce. Ensuring roles for both the public and private sector health care would help relieve the fiscal pressure on governments to cover the whole population.
	Health and well-being can also be improved by reducing inequality and the need for voluntary or forced migration from low-resource to higher-resource communities. Forced migration, rates of which tend to be higher among those in the bottom half of the population, carries significant health risks, including cross-border spread of pandemics, and lower rates of access to health services.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable	Urban sanitation, including proper sewage, waste disposal systems, and air quality help ensure community health and wellness. Enhanced transportation systems facilitate access to health services. Urban areas impacted by natural disasters (e.g. floods) are at risk for poorer health. Enhanced green and public spaces allow for greater physical activity and prevention of chronic, non-communicable diseases. Urban environments need to facilitate healthy behavior for people of all ages.

⁶ World Health Organization, Global Health Observatory Data, Water and Sanitation, http://www.who.int/gho/mdg/environmental_sustainability/en/

⁷ International Energy Agency, <http://www.iea.org/topics/energy/poverty/>

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'Towards An "Energy Plus" Approach For The Poor – A review of good practices and lessons learned from Asia and the Pacific', 2011.

⁹ <http://www.who.int/hdp/en/>. Accessed March 3, 2015.

¹⁰ David Bloom, David Canning, Population Health and Economic Growth, Commission on Growth and Development, Working paper No. 24, 2008, p.1.

12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	Reducing the release of chemicals and their wastes into the environment can help reduce the harmful effects on human health. Strengthening indigenous innovation and scientific and technological capacities will help countries ensure sustainable production and consumption of health-enhancing products appropriate for their populations.
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	Climate change will have an immediate impact mainly by exacerbating health problems that already exist. After 2050, there is a risk of higher emissions scenarios exceeding conceivable adaption potentials and leading to major impacts on health, particularly among the poor. For example, 60% of people in the world work outside; as temperatures increase, heat stress will kill more people. Globally, 99% of deaths related to climate change occur in low- and middle-income countries and of these deaths, 80% occur among children. ¹¹
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	Pollutants entering the marine environment can create and exacerbate the growth of microbiological pathogens, for example enterobacteria, enteroviruses, and cholera vibrios. People can contract disease by bathing in polluted sea water or spending a long time on polluted sands.
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	Health is integrally linked to biodiversity, including the discovery and development of new medicines and vaccines. Close collaboration between researchers, the private sector, and providers of the genetic material will be critical to ensure that the research benefits are shared equitably and that access to genetic resources is provided on a mutually agreed basis.
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	Peaceful and stable societies with strong public institutions are conducive, if not essential, for societies to achieve the health goals and targets necessary to facilitate economic growth and development. Peace and stability also promote private investment in health infrastructure and indigenous innovation. Companies can provide vital resources to sustain health and survival in instances of conflict and societal instability. Humanitarian relief, emergency health services, etc., are critical but only serve as stop-gaps.
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	All companies will have a pivotal role to play in partnering with the public sector and civil society to achieve improved health outcomes to advance global development. Individually and collectively, companies will need to assess their potential contributions to each of the SDGs. Governments will need to provide the enabling environment and the partnership framework within which partnerships can flourish and succeed.

¹¹ The Challenges of Climate Change: Children on the front line. Florence: United Nations Children's Fund. Office of Research; 2014. <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/716>, cited in "PMNCH Knowledge Summary #32 Protecting women's and children's health from a changing climate," The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, 2014, <http://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/summaries/ks32/en/>

