

Global health

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Why study global health?

Global health must be of concern to all of us. This is particularly important because many diseases (e.g. malaria, TB, HIV/AIDS, etc) are not limited by political boundaries.

There are also health disparities. The first example is life expectancy is 84 years in Japan and only 52 years in Sierra Leone. In addition, there are a number of lifesaving technologies (e.g. vaccines) that are widely used in high-income countries but are not available in low-income countries.

The crucial link between health and development is another reason to pay attention to global health. Poor health of mothers is linked to poor health of babies. It can affect children's academic performance, and, therefore, their future economic prospects. Countries with major health problems, such as high rates of malaria or HIV, have difficulty attracting the investments needed to develop their economies.

Some definitions

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. It is the state when natural functions are freely performed and there is no pain.

Public health is the science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting physical and mental health. Some examples of public health activities would include promoting child immunization, forcing people to use seat belts when they drive, and actions to get people in a specific setting to eat healthier foods and to stop smoking tobacco.

The biggest difference between “public health” and “medicine” is the focus on the health of populations (public health) rather than on the health of individuals (medicine). For example, a physician cares for a patient who is getting vaccinated, whereas a public health specialist is likely to focus on how to ensure that the whole community gets vaccinated. Another difference is that medicine is concerned about giving medical care, whereas public health is aimed to prevent disease for communities and promote healthy lifestyle.

Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted **the Millennium Declaration**, establishing a global partnership of countries. Countries that signed pledged to meet goals by 2015.

There were eight **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs):

- (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- (2) achieve universal primary education;
- (3) promote gender equality and empower women;
- (4) reduce child mortality;
- (5) improve maternal health;
- (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- (7) ensure environmental sustainability;
- (8) develop a global partnership for development.

All goals relate to health, whether directly or indirectly: three of the eight MDGs are focused on health, while health is also a component of several other MDGs (nutrition, water and sanitation).

Major global events related to the MDGs include: the 2001 and 2011 UN special sessions on HIV/AIDS, convened to intensify international activity to fight the epidemic; the 2005 World Summit, which reaffirmed the commitments to the Millennium Declaration; the 2008 high-level event at the UN in New York, where there was a call to accelerate progress towards the MDGs; the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Summit, which concluded with the adoption of a Global Action Plan and the announcement of multiple initiatives against poverty, hunger and disease, as well as initiatives designed to accelerate progress on women’s and children’s health.

Useful links:

- [The Global Health Observatory](#) -- provides access to health articles
- [The Global Burden of Diseases](#)

Results

(1) The number of people living on less than US\$ 1.25 per day has declined by more than half, from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. Similarly, the proportion of undernourished people in the developing regions has fallen from 23% in 1990–1992 to 13% in 2014–2016.

(2) The primary school net enrollment rate in the developing regions reached 91% in 2015, up from 83% in 2000. The literacy rate among youth aged 15 to 24 has increased from 83% in 1990 to 91% in 2015.

(3) More girls are now in school compared to 15 years ago. In southern Asia, only 74 girls were enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys in 1990, and today 103 girls are enrolled for every 100 boys.

(4, 5) Child mortality has fallen by 53% and maternal mortality by 43%.

(7) Ozone-depleting substances have been eliminated since 1990. 91% of the global population was using an improved drinking-water source in 2015, compared to 76% in 1990

The MDGs have been applied as one-size-fits-all instruments with targets that every country can meet, even though they were never meant as targets for individual countries. Global targets are less useful for countries with a low starting point or in conflict situations.

Sustainable Development Goals

On 25 September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the new development agenda “Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development”. The agenda contains 17 goals that integrate economic, social and environmental aspects.