WHO: moving forward on the SDGs

WHO’s Constitution calls for “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition” reflecting the ideals of SDG 3 “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”.

WHO’s programme budget for 2016–2017 contains a range of activities specifically related to advancing the SDGs, including:

• moving towards universal coverage
• enhancing efforts to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health
• accelerating progress towards elimination of malaria
• expanding our work on prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases
• promoting good health at key stages of life, taking into account the need to address health equity, social determinants of health and human rights, with a focus on gender equality
• working with other sectors that impact health including:
  ~ environmental and occupational health trends
  ~ access to water and sanitation
  ~ access to sustainable and modern energy
  ~ promotion of decent work and a safe work environment
  ~ making cities and human settlements cleaner, safer and more sustainable
  ~ action to tackle climate change and its impacts
  ~ death and illness from environmental pollution.

A new era for global public health 2016–2030

From MDGs to SDGs

Women & health are central to sustainable development

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are relevant to all countries worldwide. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set a limited number of human development targets for poverty eradication, health, education, food security and nutrition, the SDGs go much further and ask much more from the world’s countries.

The new agenda integrates all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) around people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. It recognizes that so many of the development goals impact one another and are interrelated and interdependent.

While some have questioned the breadth and ambition of the SDGs, others acknowledge that the range of topics more closely reflects the real issues that governments have to deal with than the narrow agenda of the MDGs did.

Health has a central place as a major contributor and beneficiary of sustainable development policies.

Almost every one of the 17 new goals is directly related to the health of the world’s people or will contribute to health indirectly. The specific health targets are no longer focused just on saving lives in poor countries, but in creating healthier societies and promoting wellbeing for everyone worldwide.

The SDGs recognize the importance of equity – we must address the needs of women, children, and the poorest, most disadvantaged groups to achieve true sustainable development.

In November 2015, the World Health Organization will launch Health in 2015: from MDGs to SDGs. This report looks back 15 years at the trends and positive forces during the MDG era and assesses the main challenges that will affect health in the coming 15 years.

About WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) is building a better future for people all over the world. We are committed to helping countries address ongoing public health issues and health emergencies, recommending solutions to ensure that health becomes a positive force for all the world’s peoples of present and future generations. To do so, we work with countries to reduce premature deaths from disease and ensure the safety of the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink and the medicines and vaccines that treat and protect us.

Our work aims to provide every child, woman and man with the best chance to lead a healthier, longer life.

Working through offices in 150 countries, six regional hubs and headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, our organization keeps a close eye on health trends, looking out for new threats and for new opportunities. We gather the world’s top technical experts to examine critical issues, define the best solutions and deliver the strongest guidelines. We then mobilize governments, health workers and partners to apply this evidence to make the right decisions and bring better health for all.

As the lead health authority within the United Nations system, WHO strives for a world where everyone has an opportunity to attain his or her potential for the best possible health.
MDGs: great progress, lessons learned

Some called the MDGs unrealistic. Yet, progress towards the MDGs has, on the whole, been remarkable and many global progress records have been set. Globally, the HIV, TB and malaria epidemics were turned around, child mortality and maternal mortality dropped significantly though not at the rate of the MDG targets. The MDGs have gone a long way to shape the international discourse and debate on development, and also contributed to major increases in development aid. Many lessons about improving global health were learned through efforts to achieve the MDGs and these are reflected in the new agenda for 2030, including:

- a broader approach to improving health in all countries, including addressing noncommunicable diseases, mental health and injuries
- emphasis on strengthening health systems
- recognition that other sectors like education and urban planning affect and are affected by health
- a focus on improving equity within and between countries, rather than just focussing on aggregate targets
- recognition that disease outbreaks, natural disasters and humanitarian crises are a threat to sustainable development

The MDGs and health

The MDGs have gone a long way to shape the国际事务, and the debate on health and, in turn, benefit from a healthy population. Economic determinants, such as education, income and urbanization, have an impact on aggregate targets. The MDGs recognize that natural disasters, disease outbreaks, war and other humanitarian crises reflect the SDG's strong focus on equity and the importance of addressing the needs of poor or disadvantaged groups wherever they may live.

The health goals of the SDGs embrace bold new goals for turning the tide on noncommunicable diseases. They also specifically address the toll of injuries and determinants of health such as increasing urbanization, pollution and climate change.

Important health issues that were not addressed in the MDGs and now have targets in the SDGs include mental health, substance abuse, health impact from hazardous chemicals, water and soil pollution and contamination and the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. An additional target addresses reducing and managing national and global health risks, for example, from contagious diseases.

Universal health coverage provides an overall framework for the implementation of a broad and ambitious agenda in all countries. This is the only target that cuts across all of the health goals, addressing linkages with health-related targets in the other goals. Health reflects the SDG's strong focus on equity and the importance of addressing the needs of poor or disadvantaged groups wherever they may live.

Barely mentioned in the MDGs, health systems play a key role in the 2030 agenda, which recognizes that natural disasters, disease outbreaks, war and other humanitarian crises are a major threat to sustainable development. The SDGs outline the need to support countries to detect and manage health risks, build resilient health systems and focus on protecting the most vulnerable populations.

MDGs: achievements on health at a glance

HIV, tuberculosis and malaria targets (falling and reversing the global epidemics) have been met.

Child mortality decreased by 53% – a great achievement, but falling short of the 67% target.

Deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth (maternal mortality) have fallen by more than 40%, impressive but short of the 75% target.

The target for drinking water has been met, with 91% of the global population using an improved drinking water source, compared to 78% in 1990.

Between 1990 and 2015, the global prevalence of underweight among children aged less than 5 declined from 25% to 14%, nearly reaching the target of a 50% reduction.

The SDGs and health

At first glance it could appear that health has a less central role in the SDGs than the MDGs: just one out of 17 SDG goals sets specific targets for health. However, this single health goal “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages” is broad, undepended by 13 targets that cover a wide spectrum of the work that WHO does.

Furthermore, as a major contributor and beneficiary of sustainable development policies, health cuts across many of the other 16 goals and thus retains a central position across the entire SDG framework.

Health is positioned by the SDGs as a key feature of human development in a more integrated manner than was the case for the MDGs. Social, environmental and economic determinants, such as education, income and urbanization, have an impact on health and, in turn, benefit from a healthy population.

The world faces new and growing challenges that have profound implications for health, including: rising inequalities within and between states; profound demographic and epidemiological changes; spiral conflict, violence and extremism; increased migratory flows; the depletion of natural resources; the adverse impacts of environmental degradation; and the prospect of irreversible climate change.

Trends, determinants and risks that impact health include:

- Population trends, including fertility decline and population growth, changing population structure and age, migration and urbanization
- Economic and development trends, including poverty eradication and equity, globalization and trade, and financing for development
- Social determinants such as gender, education and income
- Human rights and equity, violence against women
- Technological development
- Environmental determinants and risks, including climate change
- Disease outbreaks, natural disasters, conflicts and other humanitarian crises

The SDGs were developed in recognition that eradicating poverty and inequality, creating inclusive economic growth and preserving the planet are inextricably linked, not only to each other but also to population health; and that the relationships between each of these elements are dynamic and reciprocal. They continue to prioritize the fight against poverty and hunger, while also focusing on human rights for all and the empowerment of women and girls. The SDGs recognize the vital role that women play in social and economic development and reaffirm the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development.

While the SDGs include the ‘unfinished business’ of the MDG era, they also address a major shift in health patterns that accelerated during the MDG period. Improvements in economic and social conditions in many developing countries, along with poverty reduction, nutrition improvements and substantial progress on preventing and treating communicable diseases, has resulted in a substantial shift in the major causes of death and illness globally. The demographic transition – people are living longer and having fewer children – along with the associated transition from communicable diseases, maternal and perinatal conditions, and nutritional deficiencies to noncommunicable diseases and injury, has progressed substantially in many developing countries.

Infectious diseases and malnutrition used to be the world’s biggest killers. Now noncommunicable diseases, which include heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease, represent the major killers in most countries.

The health targets of the SDGs embrace bold new goals for turning the tide on noncommunicable diseases. They also specifically address the toll of injuries and determinants of health such as increasing urbanization, pollution and climate change.

Other SDG targets that directly impact health

- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- By 2030, end harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage
- By 2030, end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls
- Ensure delivery in safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round
- By 2030, end all forms of harmful use of alcohol
- Combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases
- By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents
- Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate
- Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and noncommunicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use to the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all
- Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States
- Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, disaster prevention and management of national and global health risks
- By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescents, pregnant and lactating women and older persons
- By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations