

Sustainable Development

Author: Anna Lewis (National Committee)

Introduction

The significance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be understated. It is underwritten, only in part, by the 193 countries that adopted the SDGs and made the goals their development blueprint for the next 15 years (1). The 17 far reaching goals¹ heavily incorporate the social determinants of health and the root causes of poverty, and span across many realms including planetary health, gender equity, elimination of poverty, access to healthcare, and peace (1). They are an encouraging symbol of a move to a more progressive and collaborative approach to setting the world agenda and set out a holistic vision for the future, towards which all signatory countries are now expected to strive.

Considering the ambitious and wide-ranging nature of the goals, it is imperative that organisations both large and small advocate towards their achievement, including Students for Global Health. The future envisaged by the SDGs is a world in which our vision has been achieved and equity in health is a reality for all. Achieving this vision is not a small task and dedication and collaboration are crucial.

At Students for Global Health, we have been focusing on the SDGs since the Global Health Conference hosted in Bristol in 2016 'Our Roles in the Goals', and have continued this work through our Coordinated Theme of the same name in 2017-8. This policy underlines our commitment to continue working towards the SDGs in all that we do, alongside our affiliates and partners, as a multidisciplinary movement.

Calls to Action

For Students for Global Health to take forward their work towards the ambitious aims of Sustainable Development Goals, it pledges to take the following actions:

Members

- Engage with Students for Global Healths educational tools to learn about SDGs, for example the Top Trumps series and the Resource Hub

Local

- To ensure we connect and make reference to the relevant SDGs in all that we already do, to map how we are contributing to achieving the SDGs
- Work with relevant partners and affiliates in specific campaigns to achieve the goals, such as Healthy Planet, Sexpression and Crossing Borders
- To ensure the SDGs are appropriately addressed in curricula across higher education
- Provide a platform for discussion and engagement with the SDGs through speaker events and training workshops

¹ [Here](#) is a really helpful UN website that gives detail of each goal and extra resources

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- To support the work of broader organisations that share our vision in their campaigns towards achieving the SDGs

National

- To input into the UK's efforts to enact the SDGs, for example with continued involvement with UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD)
- To continue campaigning at a national level for achieving the SDGs through various focused campaigns, for example, against upfront charging and discrimination in the NHS.
- to support and engage with research on the SDGs in order to facilitate further understanding and engagement

International

- To ensure the SDGs remain high on the International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) agenda

To continue working with other relevant international stakeholders to ensure youth input into the SDGs

Background

The SDGs replace the previous set of global targets the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which expired in 2015. Despite their achievements, the MDGs have faced many criticisms for being top-down, too narrow and target focused, and not including the broader determinants of health (2). The consultation for the SDGs set to move away from these criticisms from the offset. The UN's most inclusive consultation process to date began at the UN Rio+20 Summit with the establishment of an open working group which included representatives from 70 countries (3). In addition, the UN conducted 'global conversations' which included 11 thematic and 83 national consultations, door-to-door conversations and an online survey to get global input into the priorities for the future (4). The consultation period culminated in the United Nations Development Summit in New York in September 2015 at which 'Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' was launched, which included the 17 goals and was adopted by 193 countries (1).

Despite the existence of development agendas for decades, the SDGs are still urgently needed in a world in which 8 men own the same monetary wealth as half the world (5), there are unprecedented numbers of displaced people, in 2017 reaching 65.8 million (6), over 8 million tons of plastic are being dumped in our oceans every year (7), and we see a global rise of far-right politics. It is essential to have a united vision for the future and another tool with which we can hold our governments to account and campaign for change.

Criticisms

Although the SDGs have been largely welcomed around the world, and have been praised for their holistic, collaborative approach, they have faced criticism. One critic, social anthropologist Dr Jason Hickel, argues that they are contradictory; that SDG 8, which focuses on economic progress and sets a target of 7% GDP growth, is incompatible with the pledge for sustainable consumption in SDG 12 (8). Hickel argues

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that achieving this level of growth relies on continued extraction, production and consumption which cannot exist while living within our planetary means. Furthermore, critics believe the goals do not go far enough, although visionary in their breadth, the solutions they outline fall within the same systems that created the level of inequality we see today. Hickel argues system change is needed to truly achieve a fair and sustainable world, and the SDGs do not envisage a new economic model that would benefit both people and planet (9,10).

Additionally, through moving away from the MDG format of a numbers-driven, top-down approach, the SDGs run the risk of being too vague and too hard to achieve. Critics are concerned that the sheer number of targets makes them unworkable, and too messy compared to the clear cut MDGs (11).

The 5 Ps

Agenda 2030 hopes to appease these critics through arranging the goals into themes to make the SDGs easier to apply. Although each goal has its own targets, 169 in total, they are all interrelated. Agenda 2030 divides the 17 goals into 5 themes of critical importance: People, Planet, Peace, Prosperity, and Partnership (or the 5P's) (1).

At Students for Global Health we have used the 5 Ps format to work through the SDGs and educate, advocate and act across the network. We have done this because we recognise that health is much more than the absence of disease and full health does not rely on access to good healthcare alone (12). Instead, we believe at Students for Global Health that the ability to lead a flourishing life, with good physical health and mental well-being, requires much more holistic conditions than simply access to healthcare (13, 14). It relies on all the social determinants to health that ensure a healthy environment in which we live, work and grow and including education, good housing, fair employment, peace and justice (15).

This policy lays out how all elements of the SDGs, through the 5 Ps, relate to this broad definition of health, and why we must therefore commit to working towards each goal in order to achieve health equity.

People

This theme of the SDGs is committed to ending poverty and hunger; ensuring that all people can fulfil their potential, living in dignity and equality in a healthy environment (1). This theme also includes the targets for access to healthcare, as well as tackling (both over and under) nutrition, access to healthy lifestyles, and safe living conditions (1).

Peace

Under this theme the SDGs focus on fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies. These conditions are necessary to achieve health equity as a healthy life is completely incompatible with living in fear and violence (1). Conflicts affect all areas of life and have led to unprecedented levels of global displacement in the last decade, leaving people in extremely precarious living conditions. These challenges must be overcome if we want to see health for all.

Planet

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This theme underlines the global commitment to take urgent action on climate change and protect the planet from degradation through sustainable consumption and production, as well as sustainable management of natural resources (1). The health of the planet relies on this urgent action which is necessary for our own survival. Human and planetary health are intrinsically linked: through extreme weather and climate disruption, the survival of ecosystems, food production, and the spread of disease to name a few.

Prosperity and Partnership

These two themes run as threads through all of the SDGs. The former is focused on ensuring all people have the opportunity to enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives, while reasserting the commitment for economic, social and technological progress to occur in harmony with nature (1,16). This is a necessary condition to having enabling the social determinants of health required to live a flourishing life. The latter provides space for a firm commitment to ensuring progress to the SDGs spans all disciplines and countries. Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs make no discrepancy between 'developed' and 'developing' nations; instead these are goals for us the whole world to take forward.

Conclusion

These goals are ambitious and absolutely necessary. Although the level of injustice and inequality in the world at the moment can feel impossible to overcome, the SDGs provide a blueprint to an alternative future. However, they will only be an effective means of change if we know about them, use them in our everyday work, champion success and hold our governments to account when insufficient progress is being made. They can provide a term of reference to turn to and transparently monitor our progress, to ensure we are marching towards a better future, to a fair and just world in which equity in health is a reality for all.

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