

Global Health Governance in the 21st Century: A Philosophical Framework



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As the world negotiates a post-2015 sustainable development agenda, the global community has a unique opportunity to define a new approach to the future of global health, to explore the relation between global governance and health inequities, and address the philosophical underpinnings.

The philosophical framework positions health as a shared social objective, central to all sectors, and a fundamental human right. Although valuable, this approach could be strengthened by freedom and capability. People should enjoy leading the lives they have reason to value, including the freedom to lead a healthy life. The capability approach emphasizes the collective social responsibility to protect this potential by removing the societal constraints that inhibit an individual's capabilities (e.g., poverty, the deprivation of political rights, a chronic lack of social security, and other "unfreedoms"). Seen through this lens, the health gains that might result from a strengthened global governance system are not just an end in themselves, but part of a range of interdependent processes that combine to improve an individual's freedoms.

A philosophical framework alone is insufficient to mobilize action. One should address previously underexplored aspects of global governance, showing that diverging interests and power asymmetries shape policies across all sectors, with the potential to exacerbate health inequities. Furthermore, by identifying five systemic dysfunctions of global governance, this provides a valuable explanation of the current global governance system's inability to balance power asymmetries and to protect and promote public health in policy making domains outside the health sector. We would add to this analysis what we believe is a vital

aspect of the current system of global governance. Global governance for health requires consideration of issues in need of long-term solutions and collective action, such as the environment, finance, food systems, knowledge, migration, and security. However, national leaders tend to prioritize short-term issues over long-term national and international priorities and interests. The ability to plan and act for the future at the global level is likely to be impeded by a mismatch between the global need for long-term thinking and leaders' desire to respond to voters' immediate interests. An honest conversation about this problem must take place if governance is to advance the health of the world's population.

To achieve these purposes there is a need for the creation of two international bodies: a Multistakeholder Platform on Governance for Health to improve collaboration between sectors and an Independent Scientific Monitoring Panel to produce knowledge and identify ways in which intergovernmental decisions outside the health sector might worsen health inequities. These proposals are likely to be influenced by the same diverging interests and power asymmetries. We believe that there is an urgent need for a better understanding of the political dynamics that occur when states, civil society, and the private sector meet in the global arena—and of mechanisms by which these actors can solve collective action problems.

In an increasingly interdependent world, the concern for diverging interests and power asymmetries requires a more ambitious response if we are to harness opportunities for shared responsibility and global solidarity for health among nation states and non-state actors.

In the post-2015 development agenda, health might ultimately be encapsulated in a single goal. However, other goals will affect health directly and indirectly, and actors in global health must adapt to a changing agenda in which health issues are no longer approached in isolation from other sectors. The global conversation should not stop. It is now the responsibility of academics, policy makers, intergovernmental institutions, and students from all disciplines to provoke discussion, and together shape a positive future for global health.



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