

While the core elements of public health remain essential, other considerations, such as communications, economics, social justice, sustainable development and foreign relations, are now equally fundamental and firmly intertwined with global public health. This is illustrated by the social development goals set by the current United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2001.

Health diplomacy will be an important element in ensuring that health goals and broader development goals are included and integrated into the common goals in the post-2015 development agenda now being discussed in the UN. It is worth recalling that the prime mandate of the UN is the promotion of global peace and security. The fact that in recent decades it has placed health and other development issues higher on its agenda is testament to the fact that these are crucial elements for socioeconomic security, and thus for overall peace and security.

A panel discussion on how countries should engage in the post-2015 debate highlighted the achievements made so far in the Region in regard to the MDGs. Some countries have made great progress and have met the health targets set. Others will not be able to achieve the targets by 2015 but there is still a lot that can be achieved by 2015 and it is important to engage now in the discussions that will shape the goals that will be set for the following years.

It is critical that countries of the Region involve themselves in the global consultation process already in motion. In the near future a synthesis report will be presented by the UN Secretary-General to Member States to set the stage for negotiations leading up to the Heads of State and Government Summit in September 2015. In the context of health, maternal and child health, among other unfinished goals, are likely to remain on the agenda, and broader goals encompassing universal health coverage, the social and environmental determinants of health, and noncommunicable diseases will also be key issues.

The issue of noncommunicable diseases is one that countries in the Region need to be particularly cognisant of. The socioeconomic impact is increasing rapidly and there are regional specificities to the epidemic that need attention. Action is needed on many fronts that lie outside the health sector and countries need to be more proactive in addressing all aspects. Domestic health diplomacy across all sectors is crucial in this regard, as is regional engagement at the highest level in global policy-setting.

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