

Health and Sustainable Development: Impact of International Organizations

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The Human Development Report says; “people are the real wealth of the nation. The basic objective of development is to create and enable people to live long”. According to one of the Nobel Prize winners in India, the process of development is enlarging peoples’ choices, leading to long lives and good health, enjoying descent standards of living.

Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising needs of the future. There are two separate parts; concept of essential needs and the idea of limitation.

Health, as defined by WHO is the complete physical, mental and social wellbeing not merely the absence of a disease. This definition is not changed. But 20 years ago India introduced the word ‘spiritual well being’ into this definition.

International Health is “health that is beyond boundaries of a single nation or state”. This is important because there are differences in health due to differences in social environment. As an example if we compare the number of women die during pregnancy; in Sweden it is 1:17400 and in Afghanistan it is 1:8. International health has an old story. In the past, people moved from place to place carrying diseases along with goods. Therefore, the first part of disease diplomacy was public health related infections. The International Sanitary Conference established in 1851 is the first organization in this regard. Later, big institutions and organizations came out. Examples are European Union and UN which came soon after the Second World War.

People contribute money to international organizations to obtain national protection, prestige influence, further knowledge & research and to support private investments. International health organizations are usually divided in to 3 groups; Multilateral organizations (WHO, World bank, United Nations Children’s Fund, Populations Fund and other organizations like WTP , GFATM (Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria)), Bilateral organizations (USAID, NIFID) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGO). There are more than 2000 NGOs in the world.

World Health Organization is the United Nations Specialized agency for health. It is established on 07.04.1948 and mandated to lay down a global health policy with the objective to attain the highest possible level of health. WHO has 6 regions with elected regional directors. The core functions of WHO involve providing leadership on global health matters, articulating evidence based policy options, articulating ethical and evidence based policy options, shaping the research agenda, generation , translation and dissemination of knowledge, setting norms and standards, promoting and monitoring their implementation, monitoring the health situation and assessing health trends. WHO (World Health Assembly) has made its agenda listing the priorities. This includes eradication of malaria, health worker crisis, mother and child mortality, violence and health etc. More and more social and political issues are coming now. Eg: tobacco, alcohol etc.

UNICEF is another organization which is mandated to protect rights of the children. All children have right to have education, name and nationality. Its work includes child survival, basic education and health promotion.

UN is also involved in health and it has held 2 summits; Summit for HIV in 2000 and Summit for Non Communicable Diseases which was held last year.

World Bank which started 30 years ago provides largest money for health development.

In 70s the goal was to have primary health care for all and in 80s and 90s the main concern was health sector reforming movements. Year 2000 onwards, the era of new universalism began. Increase in average life expectancy is one of the achievements; in 1995 it was 48 years, in 2000 – 66 years and in 2005 – 73 years. The biggest public health achievements in 20th century include control of infectious diseases by vaccination, control of neglected tropical diseases, increase in maternal and infant health, motor vehicle safety, occupational and work place safety, cancer prevention, safe and healthier food habits and recognition of tobacco as a health hazard. Work done by these organizations in Sri Lanka include capacity building, training people and supporting developmental work. Last 5 decades it has achieved great progress in raising the life expectancy, reducing maternal and child mortality, improving living conditions and activities carried out to combat with major infectious causes of death.