

We Need a New Approach in Implementing and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

I am delighted that this theme issue follows closely on the heels of the 2015 UN-General Assembly’s Resolution on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs, officially known as “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” are an intergovernmental set of 17 goals with 169 targets (United Nations 2015b). They are the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that galvanized UN agencies and other organizations – including donors, governments, civil society and non-government organizations – into tackling difficult global health issues (United Nations 2015a). While significant progress was made, we did not reach the MDG target goals that were set for 2015. The SDGs now are intended to build on the foundation created by the MDGs, while taking a more integrated system approach in the hope that the goals and targets for 2030 will be achieved.

Yet, despite attempts to create a set of goals that will be treated in a comprehensive manner, we are already witnessing vertical, sectorial thinking. The healthcare community seems to be intently focused on SDG Goal 3 “health and well being” to the exclusion of goals like Poverty, Hunger and the other 14 Goals. I strongly suggest that “Poverty,” which is Goal 1, is related to health. “Hunger,” which is Goal 2, is also related to health, and so on. I argue that if we go down the sectorial one-lane road with a narrow lens on each goal and target, by 2030 we will not have accomplished nearly as much as we could if we take a more holistic, integrated approach while working in partnerships with the relevant stakeholders. It is clear to many of us in the field of global health that partnerships with the agriculture sector, manufacturing sector and others are essential in advancing all of the SDGs.

I am delighted that Jhpiego was willing to work with us to put this issue together. The work of Jhpiego with its emphasis on continuous learning to achieve results can serve as a model for integration and global thinking with local actions. Jhpiego clearly demonstrates the influential role an NGO can play in relation to local leaders, decision makers and civil society. In the opening essay, Mancuso, Johnson, Hart and Austin (2015), describe important lessons in how to function at the community level. Concepts like “leading from behind” and “system-based approaches” help

to demonstrate the role, responsibilities, and functions of the different players in the tapestry of international projects. The case studies showcase various international projects related to maternal and child health. Readers will gain a deep appreciation of how one large and successful NGO can contribute to the attainment of the SDGs through collaboration and partnership with various stakeholders and partners covering multiple sectors.

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References

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