

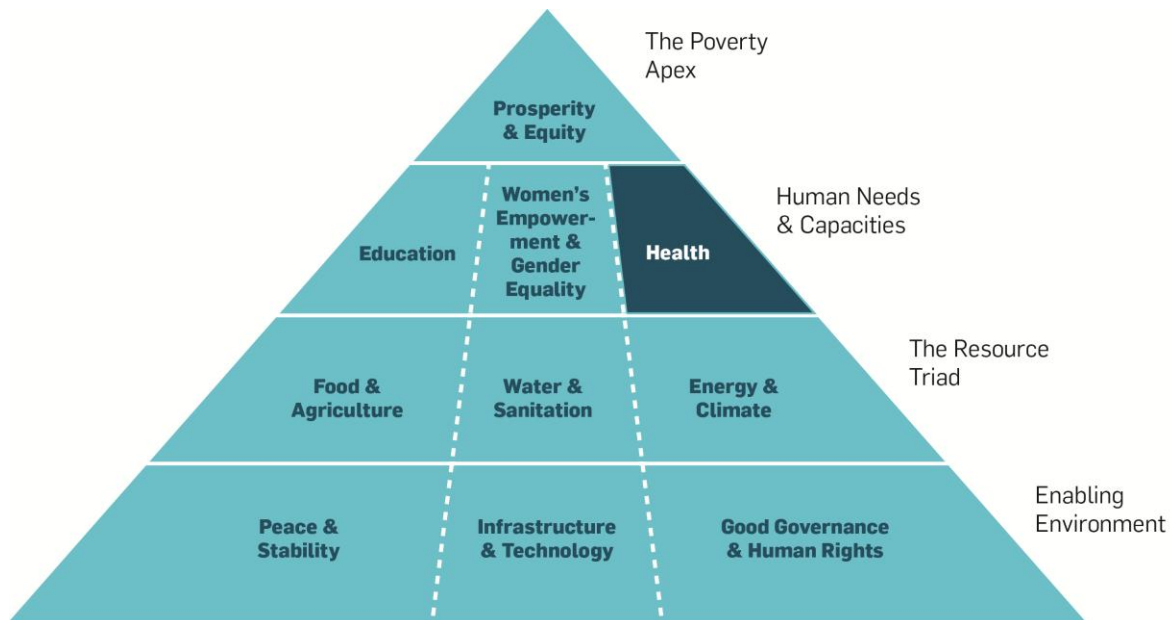
Post-2015 Agenda and Related Sustainable Development Goals Issue Focus: The Role of Business in Improving Health

Overview

As governments and policymakers work to develop the Post-2015 agenda, the international community is actively discussing the possible scope of potential sustainable development goals (SDGs). Health is central to development and is an investment that enables economic growth and wealth, as well as better lives. Millennium Development Goals 4, 5 and 6 took on specific health issues, and focused the minds of private sector and civil society on improving the health and wellbeing of poor people. For an MDGs follow-up framework, a single, integrated health issue area may be more effective and more comprehensive.

The United Nations Global Compact has been asked to bring private sector perspectives and action to this agenda, creating an historic opportunity to scale up and align business contributions to United Nations priorities. The overlap between public and private interest in sustainable development is becoming increasingly clear, and the development of the Post-2015 agenda will require an unprecedented level of interplay between business, governments, civil societies and other key stakeholders. This public-private convergence and opportunity space is reflected in the Post-2015 Business Engagement Architecture, released at the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in September 2013. The Architecture provides a resource and roadmap for how to work with the private sector in the new era.

Related to the Architecture, consultations conducted by the UN Global Compact with thousands of companies and stakeholders revealed that businesses committed to sustainability and ethics are energized by the prospect of a newly articulated set of world priorities—including clear goals and targets. From the input received, the UN Global Compact’s LEAD companies developed a series of recommended goals and priority areas (shown below) that they believe would also empower the private sector to make a substantial contribution in the Post-2015 era.



Source: Global Compact LEAD consultations

LEAD companies selected an anti-poverty drive based on inclusive economic growth, and leading to a state of general worldwide prosperity, as lead step in making possible achievement of an overall sustainable development agenda. The goal and related targets are articulated as follows:

“Goal 4: Universal health coverage, targets include:

- Affordable access to quality (meets patient needs) treatment and care for all, or to 80 per cent where such access was less than half in 2010.
- Continue to reduce the reach of TB, malaria and HIV/AIDS, and contain the spread of new drug-resistant strains.
- Halt the rise in non-communicable diseases.
- Universal reproductive health services including access to birth control and to a qualified attendant at birth.
- Cut maternal mortality rate by at least ¾.
- Reduce the under-five mortality rate by at least 2/3”

The purpose of this issue paper is to inform governments and policy makers of the responsible business community’s willingness to promote healthy lives regardless of where people live or their ability to pay, and to broadly involve the private sector in a campaign which is so much in their direct interest as well as of universal, global benefit.

Business Platforms for Action and Partnership

Health care constitutes a major industry, and pharmaceutical companies and public and private health care providers have contributed directly to a dramatic progress since the MDG benchmark year of 1990. Corporations have been key players in a global campaign to make HIV/AIDS medications more affordable; in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and in Every Woman, Every Child, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s initiative to save the lives of 16 million women and children. When avian influenza arose as an imminent threat to human health as well as to poultry and rural economies, companies joined the preventive efforts of the UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC) on animal and pandemic influenza.

Health care companies are working at a more systemic level as well. Some are charging much less for medicines and vaccines in developing countries, encouraging greater access to medicines while also benefiting from volume-based sales incentives. They are creating innovative partnerships in wide-ranging areas such as research & development, disease elimination, new business models, community partnerships, voluntary licensing and increasing the affordability of our products. The private sector can deliver both commercial and development goals through the products and services they provide, their supply chains, their distribution networks and communication activities and the benefits they grant to their employees and the communities in which their facilities operate.

New challenges are arising, and in a globalized era the crossover effect between the developed and developing world are coming to the fore. Drug-resistant strains of TB are not only threatening to undermine progress in the poor nations, but are showing up in developed world hospitals; chronic and non-communicable diseases are becoming a major cause of death now in the South as well as the North; the ability of viruses to cross over from the animal kingdom to the human is creating new diseases virtually every year, and multiple rolls of the genetic dice that might turn up a global pandemic.

To take on new as well as traditional medical challenges, multi-national medical care and pharmaceuticals acting jointly and in partnership with governments, multilateral institutions and global funds are working to produce the integration of research, production facilities, major health care institutions and local clinics and outreach. Discussions in Global Compact LEAD point to an orientation that is organized not as much around specific diseases as by establishment of a well resourced, agile global system that can respond to needs as they emerge, guided by a person-centred care ethic.

Key Driver: Public Policy and Enabling Incentives

Political will is critical if we are to achieve the health-related MDGs by 2015, as well as for the accomplishment of future goals. Nevertheless, it is clear that governments can no longer carry the financial burden alone.

Policies should be pursued to ensure an operating environment that optimizes the contribution from the private sector. Some of the key issues the private sector faces include regulatory harmonization, international reference pricing, anti-diversion, robust IP, accelerating uptake of new products and increasing vaccine coverage. Some solutions could include easing commercial entry barriers, addressing taxes and duties still imposed on medicines, and encouraging access to quality-assured medicines through private market support and advocacy in the developing world.

More can be done to leverage the private sector to find different ways of raising funds using international capital markets and new financial products. For example, the International Financial Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm) raises funds backed by 20-year donor funding.

Accountability

In recent years, increasing numbers of companies are reinforcing sustainability efforts with public commitments in relation to accountability, responsibility, and transparency. To build trust and be considered a credible partner in the Post-2015 era, companies should be – and increasingly are – transparent about not only their social and environmental impacts, but as well how economic practices create or deplete value for society, and what they are doing to improve their performance.

At the same time, companies are being encouraged to publicly commit to longer-range sustainability objectives and goals in order to better align their efforts and strategies in relation to the broad global sustainable development agenda. Participants of the UN Global Compact have made public commitments to the Global Compact's ten principles and are required to report annually on their sustainability efforts through a Communication on Progress (COP) report. Generally speaking, the UN Global Compact organizes its companies into three categories based on the level of COPs submitted. These levels – Learner, Active and Advanced – allow the UN Global Compact to encourage and challenge participants to use more sophisticated methodology and release more detailed COPs. Companies are increasingly rising to the challenge to report in a more advanced, detailed and transparent manner. This sort of accountability is crucial in instilling confidence in all stakeholders that companies are truly making meaningful progress towards global sustainability.

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