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# The Role of Healthcare in Global Sustainable Development

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Globalization has changed the way in which communities and nations interact while providing opportunity for interdependence between peoples and their economies, cultures, technology, and governance. Global forces are increasingly shaping national healthcare policies, and the importance of healthcare for the world's population now extends beyond national borders. In fact, some major issues facing global healthcare policymakers include but are not limited to: monitoring healthcare financing and expenditures; using information technology to improve clinical practice; building human capacity of healthcare practitioners; controlling communicable diseases precipitated by changes in human migration and risk behavior; and acknowledging, and effectively addressing, the physical and mental effects to post-genocidal societies caused by totalitarian rule.

This symposium will address the following sub-themes related to healthcare service reform and improvement proposed by international development scholars and practitioners from diverse healthcare-related disciplines:

**Socioeconomic Development:** papers in this section address healthcare as an integral part, and influential factor, to sustainable political and socioeconomic reform and development efforts. Contributors analyze funding needs to

finance overburdened healthcare systems; explore other funding sources to provide for healthcare services; focus on the pros and cons of privatization of healthcare services; discuss the role healthcare information technology has in addressing socioeconomic (i.e., healthcare related) issues explore the relevant factors to developing and improving healthcare systems; investigate whether the mental and physical rights of the patient are critical to development; and, discuss the role of healthcare education for sustainable development.

Results of a study by Arrodondo et al, entitled, *Qualitative Analysis of Trends on Health Financing and Governance After Decentralization in Latin America*, identify trends and results for three Latin American countries (Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru) associated with health financing and governance in context of the reform of their health systems. They found some weaknesses such as: the lack of human resources trained in health economics who could implement changes; lack of financial independence between the local and central levels; and resulting difficulty in developing new financial alternatives. However, identified strengths included, the sharing between the central and local levels of government for financing of health services; the implementation of new organizational structures for follow-up to financial changes at the local level; the development and implementation of new financial allocation mechanisms considering efficiency and equity principles; new technique of a per-capita adjustment factor corrected for local health needs; and the increase of financing contributions from households and local levels of government.

Stachura and Khashanshina address the worldwide challenge of accessing healthcare in both rural and urban settings. They address the potential for the Internet to

provide universal access to healthcare services and health information. They assert that use of the Internet in this manner is the only economically viable way to make healthcare resources available to individuals throughout communities, regions, or nations. However, these authors assert that approaches will have to be adapted to the local cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic environment and become a governmental responsibility. They believe that tele-optimized population health is a nationally-, ethnically-, religiously-, governmentally-, and racially-neutral bonus that can result from coordinated application of medical and telecommunication resources and capacity.

Cholewka in, *Healthcare System Restructuring and the Effects of Globalization on Post-Soviet Transitional Economies*, asserts that even though it has been a little over a decade since independence, there still remain unaddressed challenges with healthcare system reform for the post-Soviet transitional economies as they experience globalization. This paper is the result of a general analysis of the latest available demographic and epidemiological website information provided by international healthcare-related organizations (e.g., UN World Health Organization, US National Institutes of Health, Pfizer Inc.) and global financing institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund). Results show that mortality and morbidity rates for these countries still exceed Western rates and expenditures are not adequate to address the ongoing population health needs. It is important to target programs to the cultural needs and available resources of the people to whom the programs are directed. The best use of information technology in healthcare will be the next globalization challenge, especially telemedicine.

Gumber and Arora in, *Globalization and Health Effects in the South Asian Association for Regional*

*Cooperation Region*, discuss the dynamics, mechanism, and pathways through which the process of globalization affects the health sector in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region. These issues are further discussed in light of accessibility, efficiency, quality of healthcare delivery, geographical inequalities, heavy burden of private healthcare financing, and fiscal stress faced by governments of these countries. The authors conclude that as globalization and global integration takes place, there is a need for changes in policy and internal coordination and management at both the national and international levels – and not necessarily under the United Nations. This process has serious and complex risk implications for health systems, especially with regard to disease surveillance, treatment and prevention, foreign investment in health services, and medical tourism.

**Legal and Political Development:** this section explores the types of policies being enacted to address national healthcare needs; evaluate the extent to which the enacted policies meet the economic needs of healthcare practitioners and the stability of the system; and explore the underlying premises of the political thought and the present functioning of healthcare systems within the international/global community.

Szogs, contends in the study, *Assessing the Role of Intellectual Property Rights to Foster Research and Development: The Case of Vaccines and Drugs for Neglected Diseases*, that challenges exist in the relationship between private and public interests regarding biotechnological innovations and the role that Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) play in this relationship. This paper contends that there remains an inadequacy of IPRs to foster Research and Development (R&D) for vaccines and drugs for neglected diseases. This issue is of major concern for

developing countries. Discussion is also given to how far IPRs encourage innovation in different national and socioeconomic contexts. Special emphasis is given to the need to take the nature of different markets and the level of economic development into account in the making of global IPR frameworks. This paper makes a contribution to debates on the role of healthcare for development by discussing a range of mechanisms to support healthcare R&D in order to address public health goals.

A study conducted by Costa-Font et al, and summarized in their report, *Dealing with Health Care Security: Catastrophic Health and Drug Expenditures in Nicaragua*, examined the content, measurement and policy implications of dealing with catastrophic financial risks resulting from illness requiring health care in developing countries. Results show that there are significant differences in the meaning of insuring catastrophic expenditures in developed and developing countries and that indirect measures of catastrophic risks are highly dependent on restrictions associated with wealth and income. This indicates that the implementation of catastrophic risk insurance implies prioritizing security over efficiency in the design of health care packages in some developing countries.

It is hoped that by addressing these issues in this symposium the expanding importance of the role of healthcare for influencing and stabilizing sustainable development within a dynamic geopolitical context will be established.