Forging a Shared Future Through Health and Well-Being

January 2018
The global commitment to good health and well-being is producing remarkable results. In his 2017 annual letter addressed directly to the Gates Foundation’s biggest donor Warren Buffet, Bill Gates outlined a few major health accomplishments: the number of childhood deaths per year has been cut in half since the 1990s, more children than ever have access to the basic package of childhood vaccines, and more than 300 million women in developing countries are using modern methods of contraception. Meanwhile, life expectancy and maternal mortality rates continue to improve and the number of HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria infections have dropped steadily since 2000. Various bodies of evidence point to the strengthening of health systems in many countries, which will help accelerate these gains.

But beyond these direct outcomes, health is also a key enabler of progress in other important development areas.

Good health and well-being can help establish the foundation and conditions for individuals, families, and communities to prosper. As a fundamental element of livelihood and quality of life, the global community should not assess health as simply the absence of illness or injury, or even the basic delivery of health care, but also evaluate why and how good health and well-being empower people to learn, to work, and to thrive. An appraisal of these interrelationships is essential for understanding the true impact of global health interventions.
In this report, Devex and Johnson & Johnson set out to explore the relationship between health and four other important development areas, namely quality education, gender equality, decent work, and peace and justice. Although the impact of health goes well beyond these four areas, we purposefully sought a deeper understanding of the dependencies and linkages between Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being and the other SDGs that address these areas. To gather the necessary data, we conducted an online survey of more than 1,200 diverse development professionals and asked them why and how good health and well-being enables their work. We also interviewed several distinguished scientists and experts responsible for the Global Sustainable Development Report — the first of a quadrennial series that will inform the high-level global reviews of the 2030 agenda.

This report is not a comprehensive study of the many interrelationships between health and sustainable development. It tackles only the one-directional relationship between health and quality education, gender equality, decent work, and peace and justice in order to better understand the enabling potential of health. Yet, through this process of gathering and analyzing firsthand perspectives, we begin to appreciate the far-reaching impact of good health and well-being and how investing in global health can forge a shared future.

We found that most development professionals believe health is critical for any individual, family and community to secure a more prosperous future.

Good health and well-being encourages learning and reduces school absenteeism. Gender-focused health solutions and reproductive health are important elements in the pursuit of gender equality. Our respondents told us that health can also help increase labor productivity, build environments for economic growth and jobs, promote confidence in institutions, and enhance human and collective security.
METHODOLOGY

More on our online survey respondents

- **AFRICA**: 37%
- **ASIA**: 27%
- **EUROPE & EURASIA**: 12%
- **LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN**: 10%
- **MIDDLE EAST**: 7%
- **NORTH AMERICA**: 5%
- **AUSTRALIA/OCEANIA**: 2%

More on our in-depth interviewees

**WOLFGANG LUTZ (AUSTRIA)**: Founding director of the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, program director of the World Population Program at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, and director of the Vienna Institute of Demography of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

**DAVID SMITH (JAMAICA)**: Coordinator of the Institute for Sustainable Development at the University of the West Indies, coordinator of the University Consortium for Small Island States, and the Caribbean chair for the Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

**EUN MEE KIM (SOUTH KOREA)**: Professor and dean at the Graduate School of International Studies and director of the Institute for Development and Human Security, Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

**HENRI RUEFF (SWITZERLAND)**: Senior research scientist at the Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern.

**AMANDA GLASSMAN (UNITED STATES)**: Chief operating officer and senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, Washington, D.C.
Here are the primary insights from our respondents and interviewees on why and how good health and well-being enables other important areas of sustainable development:

**QUALITY EDUCATION**
- A foundation for cognitive and learning ability
- Reductions in student and teacher absenteeism
- Poor health detracts from education resources

**GENDER EQUALITY**
- Health equality a key factor in gender equality
- Maternal and reproductive health empowers women and families

**DECENT WORK**
- Increased labor productivity and efficiency
- More favorable investment and work environments
- Boost to household income and longer-term savings

**PEACE & JUSTICE**
- Critical aspect of human and collective security
- Economic productivity mitigates chance of conflict

**DEFINITIONS OF ENABLER AND CRITICAL ENABLER**

**ENABLER** = % of “yes” answers to the question: “Do you believe good health and well-being enables quality education, gender equality, decent work, peace and justice in developing countries?”

**CRITICAL ENABLER** = % of answers with highest score of #5 to the question: “In your opinion, to what extent does good health and well-being enable quality education, gender equality, decent work, peace and justice in developing countries?” Sliding Scale (1-5): 1 = Does not enable, 5 = Critical enabler
HEALTH: AN OUTCOME & ENABLER

The 2030 sustainable development agenda was designed with important dependencies and linkages in mind. While each SDG focuses on a different sector or subject, they are “integrated and indivisible” and balance the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The scientific and development communities say that we must understand why and how the various SDGs and their targets interact if we are going to maximize investments and scale impact.

Viewed from this more holistic perspective, survey respondents across sectors believe health is both a critical outcome and important facilitator — and driver — of sustainable development.

“There is an interconnectedness logic across goals and targets behind the SDGs. They were designed in such a way as to encourage cross-sectoral, holistic approaches and this is how we should understand and analyze them.”

– Henri Rueff
The development community agrees: health enables

SDG 3 seeks to ensure health and well-being for all. It is intentionally broad and includes diverse and ambitious targets such as reductions in communicable and non-communicable diseases, the provision of universal health coverage, and the strengthening of health systems.

Nearly all survey respondents indicate that to some degree health is an enabler of progress in other development sectors and a significant portion of respondents in each sector cite health as a “critical enabler.” The majority of respondents also believe that international donors and governments should prioritize health to drive broader socio-economic development.

“SDG 3 and how we are thinking about health today is much more comprehensive than it previously was.”
– Eun Mee Kim

We also asked our respondents about the potential impact of achieving SDG 3 among all other SDGs and development priorities. According to survey respondents, SDG 3 is among five SDGs that, if achieved, are considered likely to have the biggest development impact globally. Respondents also suggest that water, education, poverty, hunger, employment, and economy are highly linked to health.

The 5 SDGs that if achieved would have the biggest development impact globally*

- Clean water and sanitation: 55.6%
- Quality education: 48.7%
- Good health and well-being: 45.6%
- Peace, justice, and strong institution: 42.9%
- Decent work and economic growth: 41.2%

*Across all respondents

87% of survey respondents believe that in order for societies, communities, and families to experience a more prosperous future, they must have access to basic health care.
“Countries that do not understand the linkages across the SDGs will not achieve the goals. Governments must look at all these interconnections and devise cross sector strategies. For instance, health simply cannot be delinked from water, poverty, or hunger.”
– David Smith

**THE 5 SDGS MOST CLOSELY LINKED TO GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean water and sanitation</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality education</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No poverty</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero hunger</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decent work and economic growth</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
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</tbody>
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*Across all respondents*

**AN EXCERPT FROM THE BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION’S 2017 ANNUAL LETTER**

**Bill Gates:** When a mother can choose how many children to have, her children are healthier, they’re better nourished, their mental capacities are higher — and parents have more time and money to spend on each child’s health and schooling. That’s how families and countries get out of poverty. This link between saving lives, a lower birthrate, and ending poverty was the most important early lesson Melinda and I learned about global health.

**Melinda Gates:** This is why reducing childhood mortality is the heart of the work for us. Virtually all advances in society — nutrition, education, access to contraceptives, gender equity, economic growth — show up as gains in the childhood mortality chart, and every gain in this chart shows up in gains for society.

**Access to essential medicines most impactful health system component**

Since today’s conception of good health and well-being is so broad, we asked survey respondents to break down which health system components — also known as World Health Organization health system “building blocks” — deserve the most attention in order to make progress in their sectors.

Survey respondents across sectors stress that investment and activity in all health system components is necessary for sustainable progress, but access to essential medicines and leadership/governance were the top answers, followed closely by service delivery.
The international community is strongly supporting UHC, which seeks to provide all people with access to necessary health services without financial hardship in out-of-pocket payments. The World Health Assembly and the United Nations General Assembly is calling on countries to “urgently and significantly scale up efforts to accelerate the transition towards universal access to affordable and quality health care services.” International donors and low- and middle-income countries are designing and implementing strategies that are facilitating progress toward UHC. More than half of survey respondents across sectors believe that this drive for UHC will contribute positively to their work.
Education professionals say poor health and poverty hinders cognitive function and learning ability, particularly during the early years of life. According to survey respondents, good health and well-being is closely linked to cognitive capacity and educational attainment. They say that children must achieve a basic level of physical health in order to develop their mental aptitude and capitalize on educational opportunities. Survey respondents also emphasize that other critical factors, such as proper nutrition, clean water, and air, positively affect cognitive development and the ability to learn.

“There is significant causal research and evidence on how health and nutrition at early ages contributes to human prosperity later on. The science is very good. Early childhood nutrition, for instance, has an impact on educational attainment and cognitive abilities which leads to higher levels of education and wages later in life.”

– Amanda Glassman
The World Food Programme integrates school meals into its education programming. The WFP believes that when a school meals program is part of a package of investments in education, it can help maximize the return of these investments. Evidence from several studies clearly demonstrates that school meals help boost performance and cognitive ability. One global review found that children benefiting from school meal programs and adequate education provision moved up in the student rankings by 7 to 12 percentiles. A 2016 study by International Initiative for Impact Evaluation found that school meal programs are one of the few education interventions that show positive impact in both school participation (enrollment, attendance, completion) and learning (scores on cognitive, language and mathematics tests).

“Health and education are linked in both directions. Pervasive health problems and malnutrition in early childhood means that a child is not able to take full advantage of education opportunities. Meanwhile, research and experience shows that educated girls are able to take much better control of health outcomes and manage their reproductive health.”

– David Smith
Reductions in student and teacher absenteeism

Education professionals believe poor health negatively affects the ability of both students and teachers to attend school. According to survey respondents, pervasive student and teacher absenteeism in some developing countries obstructs access to quality education at both micro and macro levels. They highlight cases in their work where healthy children are forced to take care of sick parents or siblings resulting in an extensive absence from school. Respondents also cite the importance of providing reproductive health support to women and girls which is linked to improved school attendance.

“In many African countries, children have malaria or worm diseases and that keeps them from attending school. Or if their parents are very ill they have to stay home and look after them instead of going to school.”

– Wolfgang Lutz
Poor health detracts from education resources

Education professionals indicate that significant costs associated with seeking health care could be better spent on satisfying education needs. According to survey respondents, families often prioritize health care over other social demands, draining resources that could be spent on school tuition, transportation, books, and other materials. On the other hand, good health can mean more resources that could be directed towards educational needs. Sustained good health and well-being also prevents absences due to illness and, with it, reduces the need for the regaining of knowledge and skills lost, which is more time consuming and expensive, according to respondents.

86% of survey respondents say that inefficient health systems and high health care costs misdirect government and household resources that should be spent on education.
HEALTH AND GENDER EQUALITY

Health equality a key factor in gender equality

Gender-related health inequity and disparity exists in many parts of the world and health programs that address gender barriers can result in better development outcomes. Nearly all survey respondents believe women in the developing world have less access and control over health care resources and are more vulnerable to health problems than men. Gender professionals cite repressed reproductive health rights, lack of mental health support and services, and gender-based violence as key issues exacerbating health inequity. Survey respondents also say that prioritizing and properly funding female health issues can help women gain control over their household and economic decision-making.

83% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS BELIEVE EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE WILL HELP COUNTER GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

"If you don’t take gender into account when designing health solutions, if you try to be gender neutral, you often miss the boat.”
– Eun Mee Kim

DETERMINED, RESILIENT, EMPOWERED, AIDS-FREE, MENTORED, AND SAFE

The DREAMS initiative is a public-private partnership aiming to reduce HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women in 10 sub-Saharan African countries. Girls and young women account for 74% of new HIV infections among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa. The primary goal of DREAMS is to address the factors that increase vulnerability to HIV, including poverty, gender-based violence, sexual violence, and lack of access to education. The program’s sanitary pad project is credited for increasing school attendance because girls no longer feel they must stay home during menstruation cycles.
Maternal and reproductive health empowers women and families

Gender professionals stress that maternal and reproductive health is a critical component of gender equality. Survey respondents admit severe inequities in maternal, newborn, and child health programs, particularly in marginalized, poor, and vulnerable communities. They mention unsafe pregnancies, poor antenatal and neonatal care, sexually transmitted diseases, and female genital mutilation as factors that contribute to gender inequality. Sustained maternal and reproductive health establishes a necessary foundation for both men and women to contribute to their families and communities, according to respondents.

“Empowering women means providing equal access to health services and control over their health decisions. This will help drive development. Health equity is critical for broader social equity and justice.”

– David Smith

97% of survey respondents believe access to reproductive health is an important step towards gender equality

“You can see gender impact when it comes to reproductive health and maternal health. Young women after child birth don’t get the proper health treatment, in the worst case they either pass away or they have lifelong terrible health consequences, which really disables them. They cannot participate in an active life, they cannot earn their own income, and they cannot continue their education.”

– Wolfgang Lutz
**HEALTH AND DECENT WORK**

**Increases in labor productivity and efficiency**

Economic development professionals contend that good health and well-being supports labor participation and workforce development, contributing to employment and economic growth. They say that healthy populations are prerequisites for development and drivers of decent work opportunities, which in turn contribute to higher productivity and income generation at both micro and macro levels. The linkages between health, decent work, and economic growth are particularly acute in the agricultural sector — the predominant source of livelihood for poor rural communities.

**92% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAY BOTH INFECTIOUS AND NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES ARE THREATS TO EMPLOYABILITY**

**90% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS INDICATE HEALTH IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN INCREASING LABOR PRODUCTIVITY AND REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT RATES**

**HOW GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING INCREASES OPPORTUNITIES FOR DECENT WORK**

- Broadening access to health care and insurance empowers workers and their families 65%
- Providing basic health services enables disadvantaged groups to engage in economic activities 33%
- Improving health access strengthens the productivity of rural and agricultural workers 15%
Survey respondents also stress that early opportunities for decent work enhances physical, mental, and emotional well-being over time, stimulates self-worth and confidence, and provides an avenue for individuals to better integrate into society. Some respondents believe that the absence of decent work can increase susceptibility to various kinds of diseases and incite poor health habits.

“A healthy body and mind is a basic and critical component for having a decent job. There are many things that can stand between a human being and a good job, and health is one of the most critical issues we must tackle.”
– Eun Mee Kim

“Various studies reveal that one of the primary reasons people don’t work is because they were coping with illness and death. If you are sick or attending a funeral you are not making money.”
– Amanda Glassman

More favorable investment and work environments

Countries with reliable health systems and healthy populations are more attractive to the private sector which provides the majority of decent work opportunities. Economic development professionals say private sector firms assess government commitments to health and overall human capital when deciding on where to invest and operate. Moreover, according to respondents, countries with adequate health infrastructure and healthy people are able to invest in other productive sectors of the economy, such as infrastructure development, skills training, and technology, which are also important factors in building a more favorable and attractive investment climate.
Survey respondents assert that implementation and enforcement of occupational health standards for workers and their families are critical for the relationship between health and decent work. Sickness and disability brought about by the lack of occupational health and safety measures hamper productivity and reduce economic output. Respondents also say that the prevalence of non-communicable diseases today are sometimes work-related and informal sector employees in developing countries are more exposed to occupational health problems than formal workers.

“Governments are ultimately responsible for promulgating and enforcing health standards that facilitate decent work opportunities. But it is in the interests of employers that the country they are working in have a strong health care system and that they contribute to that system.”

– David Smith

MIGRANT HEALTH CENTERS

For migrant farmworkers, livelihood and economic potential is directly tied to health status. Migrants frequently work in hazardous environments often characterized by an elevated risk of injuries and illnesses, discrimination, lack of social protection, and insecurity. Poor access to health care services in migrant communities has often led to the loss of employment due to poor health.
Boost to household income and longer-term savings

Economic development professionals say poor health can limit household income by directly restricting work capacity. Survey respondents cite cases where lower income families are forced to borrow money at high interest rates or sell their lands to pay for health expenses, thus diminishing livelihood opportunities and further reducing their ability to achieve longer-term good health and well-being. They point out that governments are responsible for providing basic social safety nets — including health safety nets — that can lessen the impacts of periods of unemployment, income shocks, and crisis situations. Survey respondents also emphasize the correlation between longer life expectancy and investments and savings, which are key factors for escaping the poverty trap and economic growth.

“If you are pretty sure that you are going to live another 40 or 50 more years, you have an incentive to invest. This includes investments in education which increase productivity. Or you give the money to a bank and save, and the bank then invests it. These are all economic growth enhancing activities that are a consequence of better life expectancy.”

– Wolfgang Lutz
Critical aspect of human and collective security

Governance and security professionals believe health is a factor in both human and collective security, as well as in social cohesion and stability. They say disease outbreaks can disrupt normal social activity and destabilize governments, but also highlight that poor health systems can cause or exacerbate local disputes, distrust in government, and public disorder. They note that fragile and conflict-affected states are particularly vulnerable to individual and collective health insecurity, which can push affected populations to seek potentially extreme and violent alternatives for survival. Respondents also highlight cases where effective health delivery has helped establish confidence in local institutions and promoted a sense of security, inclusiveness, and belonging across communities.

“People in good health and well-being do not need to resort to alternative means — often coercive or violent means — to achieve their desired health and well-being status. Furthermore, less discrepancy in health status reduces resentment and contest across various groups.”

– Online survey respondent
“Dependable health delivery to marginalized populations increases trust in government and institutions. If you can get the health system to work better, it can really be a powerful mechanism for stability, peace and justice.”

– Amanda Glassman

**Economic productivity mitigates chance of conflict**

Governance and security professionals contend that healthier societies foster stronger economic growth and productivity that can provide a foundation for peace and stability. They say healthier populations are better positioned to grow their economies and stronger economies are less susceptible to conflict and strife. Negative health events can also cause public fear and hysteria that reduce workforce productivity and impact a wide range of commercial and government functions.

**HOW GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IMPACTS PEACE AND JUSTICE**

| 53% | 42% | 39% |
| Increased productivity leads to more peaceful and secure societies | Greater economic activity lessens inequalities and related instability | Improved health and disposition of individuals leads to less violent and destabilizing activities |