

Framing health in the post-2015 development agenda: Multilateral development agencies in the first phase of consultation

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In July 2012 the UN System Task Team on the post-2015 UN Development Agenda flagged UN directions around the post-2015 goals in its report: "Realizing the Future we Want for All". From strong representation in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the position of health in the post-2015 agenda is less clearly defined. The UN Secretary-General called for integration of the MDGs with the Sustainable Development agenda proposed by Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development. With these future global goals intended to be universal in their application, rather than focused only on least-developed countries, this first phase of consultation provided UN agencies with an opportunity to review the outcomes of the MDGs for their mandates, prioritize key issues and advocate for these in the thematic, country and other consultative processes. This paper analyses the framing of the post-2015 goals, with particular reference to health, at the end of this initial consultation process. The research is part of a 13 partner EU-NH&MRC international research project. It is based on 58 interviews from 31 institutions (including 18 multilateral development agencies and banks) in June and July 2013, following the release of the thematic consultation on health and the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda report. The analysis shows a range of framings of health goals, with the World Health Organization advocating Universal Health Coverage as the 'umbrella' outcome, but the High-Level Panel settling for Ensure Healthy Lives--considered a more quantifiable goal. Strategies within multilaterals varied, with some vigorously prescriptive in their preferences, others tactically vigilant in ensuring their interests were securely positioned. While framing maintained the health MDGs as a referent, extending them to include non-communicable diseases and neglected tropical diseases, framing did not adequately address the sustainable development agenda, nor locate health well within that paradigm.