

Making a cohesive health goal from the Open Working Group's camel: a critical analysis and synthesis of the proposed post-2015 Sustainable Development Goal for health

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Following a comprehensive United Nations (UN) driven consultation phase, resulting in the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the responsibility for the development of the post-2015 development goals has now shifted to the UN Member States' Open Working Group. The residual tasks of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be integrated into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) foreshadowed in the Rio +20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, and will apply to all Member States, not merely low- and middle-income countries. The final report of the Open Working Group has now been submitted to the UN General Assembly, and negotiations begin in earnest to determine its final form for implementation in 2016. The report proposes 17 Goals and 169 targets—far from the relative simplicity of the 8 goals of the MDGs—with internal inconsistencies, duplication and contradictions.

This paper critically examines the structure of the health goal SDG 3: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*. The targets are divided into two clusters. The first contains nine targets that are largely disease focused. Two targets addressing service delivery and access: “ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services” (duplicated under SDG5 on equity, but as access to “rights”) and “achieve universal health coverage”. The second set deal with systems issues—strengthening the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; supporting research and development of vaccines and medicines; addressing finance and the workforce; strengthening disease surveillance capacity. The targets range from the absolute, and aspirational to the vague and unmeasurable. The analysis we offer explores the possibility of deconstructing and restructuring the goals to provide consistency and a functional systems synthesis that would enable their holistic—and sustainable--implementation.