

The Lack of Public Health and Health Care Systems:

Global Concerns for Security

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Purpose

In this brief the lack of efficient public health and basic health care systems in developing nations is limited to the review of the problems of infrastructure and cost, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa. The review of the AIDS pandemic is used to highlight some of the issues with infectious diseases in the developing world. Both of these concerns have the potential to destabilize security throughout the globe.

White papers, journal articles, press releases, and country briefs were all reviewed to gain a better sense of what the issues are. Not much research has been done and publicly released on the topic of lack of public health and its potential affects on global security.

This brief has also been updated with information on U.S. goals for international development. Including the United States' Millennium Challenge Account program.

Summary

The development of strong public health systems in developing countries has always been undertaken as one small part of a country's economic development program. Prior to the international SARS crisis, public health was viewed through the lenses of international aid and as a policy worked on a limited basis. In the developing world lack of confidence in or a failure in the public health system could be catastrophic. This failure of public health systems in is a double edged threat to the global community.

When the necessary health care infrastructure is missing, public health systems are not enough to meet the requirements of health care. It is possible the lack of public health services only exacerbates the problem of inadequate health care.

Without a decent health care system, citizens of these developing countries will be unable to maintain economic progress. Factoring in HIV/AIDS, means the lack of a health care system forces the delegation of the problem to an already over-burdened public health infrastructure. Although HIV/AIDS is a terminal illness, proper care can improve quality of life with the disease, allowing those infected to continue to be productive during their illness. Countries that may not be dealing with a significant HIV/AIDS crises still run into problems with infectious diseases like tuberculosis.

Countries facing health crises may be more susceptible to political, social and economic instability. In some developing countries, money is spent on the development of military programs rather than improving the health infrastructure. This kind of resource allocation means a country is prepared for a military crisis,

but not a health one. Trained health workers are in short supply and the poor condition of health delivery systems complicate efforts to fight the most common infectious diseases and provide the basic health care people deserve and need to be productive participants in their country's economy.

Unfortunately the poor health of many citizens in these countries is one of the primary reasons these economies are not improving. Poor health also has potentially negative effects on education. People want jobs and the idea that health should be the first priority may be contrary to a country's immediate concern, which may be job creation and maintaining political power. If the costs of offering basic health care are often what an insurmountable obstacle for many developing nations, adding in the problems associated with the rise in the cases of infectious diseases and the increasing HIV infection rate will cause you to have a crisis on your hands that is not limited to the affected country's borders.

The failure to adequately fight AIDS could be symptomatic of fundamental problems in a developing nation's health delivery system. This threat could be applied to an outbreak of any of the infectious diseases already ravaging the developing world. The cross border spread of disease poses dangers to public health in other countries. Many diseases like tuberculosis and malaria are on the rise in developing nations.

Armed conflict may cause rapid health related deterioration as a result of damage to infrastructure and distribution systems, resource constraints, declining health personnel availability and morale, and reductions in access. The health

care system will be forced to shift from primary or preventive care to hospital based services. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) refugees and displaced populations are at a greater risk for infection and the spread of disease.

The potential threat from the developed world is two fold. This change in focus is a positive step in the direction of solving some of the problems of the lack of public health and health care in the developing world. If the solution to the health crisis in the developing world was simply an issue of money, more significant strides would have been made to improve access

Introduction

The development of strong public health systems in developing countries has always been undertaken as one small part of a country's economic development program. It has also been used as a foreign policy tool, where mass vaccinations, improved sanitation, and improvement to health care delivery systems are seen as a stepping-stone to diplomatic goodwill and increased participation in the global economy.

During the Cold War it may have been one of the many ways countries on both sides were rewarded for their support. Prior to the international SARS crisis, public health was viewed through the lenses of international aid and as a policy worked on a limited basis. It was an afterthought to those not intimately involved in the development community. But the threats have changed and that means global reactions need to change as well. There are more drug resistant viruses and bacteria, and pharmaceutical and medical innovation cannot keep up. As a global populace, we are more vulnerable than ever before. Geography is no longer an immediate protection from the dangers of violence or infectious disease.

Since September 2001 the world has changed and we are more aware of the dangers that surround us. Not only are we facing threats from rogue nations¹, the developed world is being threatened by well-organized groups of people that share a cultural ideology and a distrust of the West. This hatred is so

¹ Rogue nations include North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, countries that are thought to harbor or support terrorist organizations.

strong that traditional foreign aid packages or foreign direct investment may not change or influence their behavior in a positive manner. It may actually make the problem worse.

What needs to be done is a re-focusing of policy, the development of public health systems needs to become a major focus in the global arena. Without it many places in the world will continue to be breeding ground for terrorism, political and economic instability. This failure of public health systems in the developing world is a double edged threat to the global community. One threat emerges as infectious diseases continue to spread many of which are proving to be increasingly resistant to current pharmaceutical and medical therapies. The second illustrates how the instability that can be a result of an unhealthy and hopeless populace provides opportunities for terrorists to recruit members and wreak havoc, causing further instability through conflict.

Public Health as a Destabilizer

In the developed² world the mission of public health is to “fulfill society’s interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy”³ Its mission should be carried out through the promotion of healthy behaviors, disease prevention, and interventions initiated to enhance or improve the quality of life.⁴

A well-organized public health system should be able to⁵:

- Prevent epidemics and the spread of disease

² Countries like the United States, France and Japan

³ Institute of Medicine, Committee for the Study of the Future of Public Health, 1988

⁴ Source Public Health Overview from Health and Human Services guest lecture, Global Terrorism and Public Health, George Mason University.

⁵ Ibid

- Prevent against environmental hazards
- Prevent injuries
- Promote and encourage healthy behaviors
- Respond to disasters
- Assure accessibility of health services

All of this is provided at a significant financial cost. If one considers the fact that the public health system is chronically under funded in the United States, imagine what it must be like in a developing nation. Things many of us take for granted, like vaccinations, sanitation, water treatment, and epidemiological surveillance. If a government is barely able to feed and employ its people, providing such basic services maybe nearly impossible from an economic standpoint. And yet it is countries like this that pose a serious threat to global stability, particularly when it comes to public health and health care.

The Lack of Health Care

Health care is defined as the “care, services, and supplies related to the health of an individual. It includes preventive, diagnostic, therapeutic, rehabilitative, maintenance, or palliative care, and counseling among services.⁶ When the necessary infrastructure is missing, public health systems are not enough to meet the requirements of health care. It is possible the lack of public health services only exacerbates the problem of inadequate health care. Doctors

⁶ source: <http://healthcare.partners.org/phsirb/hipaaglos.htm>

tend to be concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural populations isolated from basic care. Instead of care being preventative, as it is in the U.S., health care is probably more for the treatment of infectious disease or illnesses long since eradicated or contained in the developed world.

Without a decent health care system, citizens of these developing countries will be unable to maintain economic progress. Factoring in HIV/AIDS, means the lack of a health care system forces the delegation of the problem to an already over-burdened public health infrastructure. Although HIV/AIDS is a terminal illness, proper care can improve quality of life with the disease, allowing those infected to continue to be productive during their illness. Countries that may not be dealing with a significant HIV/AIDS crisis still run into problems with infectious diseases like tuberculosis.

The Problem of Resource Allocation

Countries facing health crises may be more susceptible to political, social and economic instability. By not having the resources to provide for or improve their citizen's well-being, they become targets for protracted conflict and terrorism. But the problem is larger than that, declines in productivity, loss of income and decreases in life span hamper a country's ability to participate and reap benefits of the global economy. This is a vicious cycle that repeats itself until improvements are made, and all the while a country continues to fall further and further behind the rest of the world.

In some developing countries, money is spent on the development of military programs rather than improving the health infrastructure. A prime example of this is the arms race between India and Pakistan. While leaders in both countries were racing to build up their military as a show of power to the other, aid workers in the region were scrambling to make up a multi-million dollar shortfall in the fight to improve public health.⁷ This kind of resource allocation means a country is prepared for a military crisis, but not a health one. Without the proper funding infectious diseases could quickly spread to epidemic levels. A prime example is the case of India, HIV/AIDS cases are on the rise, and the government is ill-prepared to deal with the situation.

According to the Pharmaceutical Researchers and Manufacturers Association (PhRMA), healthcare spending in the poorest countries is \$57 billion short of the minimum needed for good basic care.⁸ Trained health workers are in short supply and the poor condition of health delivery systems complicate efforts to fight the most common infectious diseases and provide the basic health care people deserve and need to be productive participants in their country's economy.

In order for most developing countries to meet the basic health needs of their citizens, \$60 per capita per year needs to be spent.⁹ To many governments this goal is nearly impossible when your people are subsisting on less than what the

⁷ "Arms Race Leaves Medicines Behind", Paul Watson for the Los Angeles Times

⁸ Pharmaceutical Researchers and Manufactures of America brief "Infectious Diseases Besiege Poor Nations" (www.phrma.org)

⁹ Ibid

poorest American makes, are unable to find work, and suitable shelter is impossible to find. The \$60 necessary for basic needs is just not there.

Unfortunately the poor health of many citizens in these countries is one of the primary reasons these economies are not improving. To be productive and compete in the global economy, the populace needs to be healthy enough to work consistently. Without the steady jobs that would allow them to make the money necessary to do a better job of caring for their health, they have a difficult time remaining healthy.

Poor health also has potentially negative effects on education. If you are too sick to work, you are probably too sick to learn. In many cases children may feel it is necessary to stop attending school in order to find work and help improve their family's economic situation. Without a basic education these children grow up to become adults that may lack the skills necessary for more advance jobs.

Economics are not the only barrier to improved public health, the lack of political will and support are also stumbling blocks. People want jobs and the idea that health should be the first priority may be contrary to a country's immediate concern, which may be job creation and maintaining political power. In many countries, improved economic opportunities through the opening of manufacturing facilities and foreign direct investment, lead to more unhealthy behaviors, like smoking.

If the costs of offering basic health care are often what an insurmountable obstacle for many developing nations, adding in the problems associated with the rise in the cases of infectious diseases and the increasing HIV infection rate will

cause you to have a crisis on your hands that is not limited to the affected country's borders.

The Problem of HIV

The failure to adequately fight AIDS could be symptomatic of fundamental problems in a developing nation's health delivery system.¹⁰ The cost of the pandemic is not only being felt in economic terms, but also in political and diplomatic ones as well.

According to the UNAIDS organization, increases in the number of cases of HIV cause infrastructures and divisions of labour in households, families, workplaces, and communities to be disrupted and weakened. It increases the strain on already vulnerable state institutions. This threat could be applied to an outbreak of any of the infectious diseases already ravaging the developing world. Tuberculosis or malaria could have the same destabilizing potential if left unchecked.

In sub-saharan Africa, many of those in power are also in the groups facing the highest rates of HIV infection.¹¹ This not only stunts the growth and spread of democracy, but also provides ample opportunity for these leaders to use less than democratic means to maintain power.

In Africa, 10 times more people are dying from AIDS than from war, which is hitting hardest those of the age to participate in the political system. Infection rates are highest in the military, which negatively impacts preparedness and a

¹⁰ Pharmaceutical Researchers and Manufacturers of America brief, "Health Care in a Developing World" (www.phrma.org)

¹¹ Is HIV/AIDS a Threat to Political Stability in Africa?, a workshop summary

nation's ability to protect its borders.¹² The cycle of war that has so ravaged the region has also accelerated the spread of the disease. Areas like Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Republic of Congo, and the Sudan are prime examples.¹³ The use of rape as a tool of intimidation has accelerated the spread of HIV. In some cases soldiers involved in conflict feel they have nothing left to lose after becoming infected, and allow themselves to be carried away by reckless and destructive behavior.¹⁴

This region is already economically stunted and politically chaotic, and the AIDS pandemic only exacerbates the declining economic and political situation. With work-forces being decimated by illness there is no real incentive for companies to invest in the region. Healthcare costs alone should be enough of a deterrent. South Africa, which is the continent's brightest star, could become economically destabilized in the next decade as the HIV infection rates continue to skyrocket. The potential for continued political crisis in Africa will only be lessened when something is done about the HIV crisis. The continent is just a harbinger of things that could come if the disease continues to spread unchecked in countries like China, Russia, and India.

Problems of Security and Public Health

As the world economy has become more integrated, nations like the U.S. have become more threatened by an enemy that cannot be readily seen. Even having the most technologically powerful and advanced military will not suffice as

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

a protection against drug resistant diseases and HIV.¹⁵ We are all vulnerable to the threat posed by the spread of disease and infection. The danger increases as more and more Americans travel abroad and as our military continues to stay involved in peacekeeping missions around the globe.

This cross border spread of disease poses dangers to public health at home. As was seen with the SARS crisis, infection abroad can very easily lead to infection at home. A traveler may unknowingly pick up a virus or bacteria while traveling, and once at home begin to exhibit symptoms. By then it may be too late, the infection could have easily spread undetected to those people that the individual lives and works with. Many diseases like tuberculosis and malaria are on the rise in developing nations. One danger emerges as people in the developing countries continue to seek a better life in the developed world; they may unknowingly bring these viruses with them across the border. This may be a significant issue for those individuals coming into the country because the promise of work and a better life.

Countries facing health crises are less likely to be socially and politically stable, economically productive, and in some cases they become hotbeds for conflict and terrorism.¹⁶ This could be the case in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and the Congo. As citizens watch their way of life deteriorate, they may become more tolerant of terrorists and their rhetoric.¹⁷ People may feel disenfranchised from the political system or that the current government cannot or will not do any

¹⁵ "Make World Health the New Marshall Plan" by Robert E. Hunter, et al.

¹⁶ Changing Concepts of Security, excerpt from Tapping the Power of Health In Foreign Policy by Ambassador Robert E. Hunter and C. Ross Anthony, PhD., pg. 70

¹⁷ Ibid page 72

thing to make life better. They may seek to lay blame on others because their way of life is seen as being better. They may feel that those in countries doing better economically seek to keep them in poverty.

This frustration provides fertile ground for terrorists to recruit members and to negatively influence domestic policy. Internally factions may stop working together to build consensus, and instead will begin to battle each other for power and dominance. Such struggles may lead to armed conflict, which in turn negatively impacts an already weak health system.

Armed conflict may cause rapid health related deterioration as a result of damage to infrastructure and distribution systems, resource constraints, declining health personnel availability and morale, and reductions in access.¹⁸ During war medical assistance may be concentrated in small areas either by physical or military barriers to access. The health care system will be forced to shift from primary or preventive care to hospital based services. With this priority shift, there may not be enough resources to track infectious disease outbreaks or deal with the rise in chronic illnesses. All of this may could lead to higher mortality rates for illnesses that previously had been treatable.

Conflict also undermines a government's capacity to make decisions; leaving aid organizations and non-governmental organizations with no point of contact and a situation of political tug of war. As warfare damages homes and threatens the lives of civilians, many flee becoming refugees in neighboring countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) refugees and

¹⁸ Chapter 9: Complex Humanitarian Emergencies in the book International Public Health pg. 453, by Michael H. Merson, et al.

displaced populations are at a greater risk for infection and the spread of disease.

Conclusion

We are all at an increased risk, not only do these conflicts give greater cover to terrorists, but put us at a disadvantage with an enemy we cannot see until many times it is too late. Another cause for concern is the failure of these nations to prepare for a terrorist attack. As groups like Al Qaeda continue to use unconventional methods to sow destruction and chaos, developing nations are not only vulnerable to an attack, but for an accident related to the preparation of one.

The potential threat from the developed world is two fold. First, if infectious diseases continue to be spread unchecked, either through the lack of infrastructure or access to medications, the potential for infection in other parts of the world increases. Viruses do not get stopped at the border, and although new immigrants to many nations get screened for illnesses like tuberculosis, the threat is greatest for those traveling abroad. As in the case of SARS they become unwitting carriers for disease.

If these countries do not even have the infrastructure to adequately deal with common infectious diseases, they are in no position to deal with an outbreak caused by a biological agent. Nor are they in a position to fight the influence of terrorist organizations. People in despair will often gravitate to those who offer them hope, regardless if the path out of their despair means participating in

immoral activities. It becomes them against the world and they become convinced they must fight for something that has been denied them.

Strong governments are needed prevent and win such battles. Although inequality is rampant through out the world, it is going to take strong leadership to improve the situation. Coordination and coalition building are more effective when a stable government is involved and people feel more empowered in the political process.

The Bush Administration recognizes this and has instituted a policy called the Millennium Challenge Account. According to the USAID publication, *Foreign Aid in the National Interest*, the premise for the initiative is that countries investing in their people and working toward better economic policies will receive more aid from the United States.¹⁹ This is part of the National Security Strategy announced by the President in 2002.

The strategy recognizes that economic progress will only occur when workers can be consistently healthy, healthy enough to be productive. This change in focus is a positive step in the direction of solving some of the problems of the lack of public health and health care in the developing world. There are still several hurdles that need to be overcome and it does not go far enough to solve the problem of access to medication or cultural differences.

If the solution to the health crisis in the developing world was simply an issue of money, more significant strides would have been made to improve access. The problem historically has been that health has been secondary to

¹⁹ *Foreign Aid in the National Interest: Promoting Freedom, Security, and Opportunity (overview)*, by the U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, DC

other issues of security. Although it is now a higher priority, the question becomes is it too little too late.

Even in the U.S. health is not a priority for some individuals; in fact it could be argued that it is taken for granted. The question then becomes, if it is not a priority in the most powerful country in the world, how do you make it a priority to those who are struggling to keep up?

The global community faces considerable threats from hostile and well-organized groups, and from nature itself. The gains from improved health globally may do more to increase the security of all of us.

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