

governments over the next 5 years as outlined in the 2015 Lancet Commission's report. They should seek advice from their health ministers and listen to the consolidating voices of engaged doctors, nurses, public health, and health advocacy experts. As the Lancet Commission's report states: "A public health perspective has the potential to unite all actors

behind a common cause—the health and wellbeing of our families, communities, and countries."¹

Génon K. Jensen

Executive Director

Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL)

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The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda—Are We Doing Mental Health Justice?

To the Editor:

This year marks the target date for the Millennium Development Goals, which have led to worldwide

improvements in health and well-being in just over 25 years. Global leaders are now finalizing a new set of objectives for global development: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recent events in Nepal remind us of the ever-looming threat of natural disasters and their devastating effects on health. Over the past few years, academics have realized that climate change does

not simply express itself through gradual changes in environment, but rather more worrying are extreme events such as droughts, floods, and hurricanes.¹ Such calamities are particularly dangerous in the developing world, where emergency services and local systems are not prepared to counteract the menace of natural disasters. In the immediate sense such events pose a noteworthy threat to health that can be life threatening for many. But as physical wounds begin to heal, emotional scars mature and may remain for years. A scarcity of resources can lead to civil conflict and forced migration. Heavy impressions are left in the minds of many as a result of losing loved ones, livelihoods, and homes. In the long term, high levels of distress, such as those seen in natural disasters or disease outbreaks like Ebola in West Africa, can accumulate into epidemics of psychiatric illness.² The global community must do more to address the psychosocial needs associated with population-wide exposure to death, disease, and distress.

It is known that lack of investment in the mental health of populations is a key driver of poverty and inequality.³ The World Health Organization recently hosted its first Ministerial Conference on Global Action Against Dementia in March 2015. Ministers from around the world came together for the first time to discuss the global problems posed by dementia. Renewed focus on mental health post-2015 will prove valuable in addressing population demands and achieving universal health coverage.

Despite the increased awareness of mental health issues, political commitment to reduce the global burden of mental illness is limited. Of the 17 currently proposed United Nations post-2015 SDGs, only 1 is health related.⁴ Within this broad goal to

improve health, 3 objectives are dedicated to maternal health and reproductive care, yet only 1 mentions mental health. This goal (3.3) aims to “reduce premature mortality attributable to non-communicable disease (NCD) by one third, and promote mental health and well-being.”⁴ The latter part of this goal is encouraging because mental health is explicitly addressed; however, unlike other goals, no measurable target for disease reduction has been specified. Although a reduction in mortality of one third has been stated for NCDs, much of this will come from cardiovascular disease and cancers, which make up the bulk of the noncommunicable disease burden worldwide.⁵ Diseases such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder may not cause premature mortality, proving the only included measure of improvement in this goal to be inadequate from a mental health perspective.

Untreated mental disorders inflict a high toll, accounting for 13% of the total global burden of disease. Areas of conflict and natural disaster carry a heavier burden still, and current predictions reveal that by 2030 depression will be the leading cause of disease globally.⁶ The United Nations, although making positive strides in creating the SDGs, must include a measurable, attainable goal dedicated solely to improvement in mental health. Such devotion is a necessary platform on which further investment into mental health and changes in policy can be built.

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King's College London
Guy's Campus
London, UK

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