

Seminar on Human Security and Health

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Robert Orr's Remarks

Today's threats are becoming more and more complex, interrelated, and transnational. Traditional national security approaches alone often cannot counteract them or mitigate their impact on the lives, wellbeing, and dignity of individuals and communities. The human security concept aims to build resilience at the individual and community level to existing and potential threats by focusing on three universal freedoms: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity.

The human security approach expands the notion of security by linking top-down protection with bottom-up empowerment and acknowledges that both approaches are equally important to reducing vulnerability on a daily basis. While the concept of human security is universal, its application is locally driven and context specific, reflecting the fact that conditions and causes of insecurity vary significantly across countries and across communities within individual countries.

The core elements of human security—community-driven approaches, emphasis on interrelated threats, and the link between protection and empowerment—are at the heart of efforts that have proven successful in improving the health of individuals and communities around the world.

Likewise, a paradigm that aims to build resilience at the individual and community level can only be sustained by societies that thrive because they can count on good health. Three of the eight MDGs deal exclusively with health, reflecting the central importance of health to a person's ability to survive and to his or her livelihood, wellbeing, and sense of dignity. Health is not just a goal in itself but a critical resource for achieving the three freedoms that are central to human security.

Last month, the Secretary-General launched a global effort on women's and children's health along with the Prime Minister of Norway, the President of Tanzania and other key players. Of all the MDGs, MDG 5 on maternal health is the one lagging behind the most. Yet, no other health issue as maternal health is so central to building stable, peaceful and productive societies. No other health issue cuts across as much into the development, security and human rights agendas.

The woman who receives prenatal care gets more than just a monthly exam – she is better able to protect herself and her children from HIV, malaria and other diseases. The clinic that can help women through childbirth is also well-placed to respond to other needs. Safe motherhood is the tie that binds families, communities, nations and our global society.

That is why the Secretary-General has made the achievement of maternal, newborn and child health a top priority. He has been raising the issue to a different level, bringing it to the political

platform and engaging Heads of State and Government, along with top level experts, representatives from the private sector, foundations and civil society. But he went further, engaging all these actors around a Draft Joint Plan of Action paired with an accountability framework to accelerate delivery and hold all players accountable for the achievement of this critical goal.

The Draft Joint Action Plan will respond to the critical need for increased attention to women's and children's health recognizing the diversity of different country situations, and will support an approach where women and children are at the centre of efforts to improve the health of families and communities. In addition, the Draft Joint Action Plan will focus on the need for integration and coordination, among programs and sectors, fostering important links with HIV prevention, treatment and care, as well as with other closely related topics, such as education, gender equality and nutrition.

Global health often has broader impacts, affecting surrounding communities and elsewhere around the world. At the same time, health is impacted by many other challenges, from poverty to inequality, environmental degradation, and violence. The HIV/AIDS pandemic and the recent H1N1 pandemic remind us that health challenges know no borders, and can have global implications on economies and societies around the world well beyond the health field. They also offer very clear examples that communities facing challenges such as pervasive poverty or violent conflict are the least equipped to deal with pandemics and their impacts, posing a threat not only to themselves, but to everyone around the globe.

Efforts to advance maternal, newborn and child health as well as to action against infectious diseases highlight the importance of linking protection and empowerment: government services are needed to ensure that people have accurate information and access to preventive and treatment services, but health will continue to be affected unless people take the initiative to protect themselves and those around them and to seek prevention and treatment when needed.

Given the critical role that bad health plays in reducing individuals' and communities' resilience to other threats, global health is a central pillar in efforts to build prosperous, stable communities. Health investments should not be seen as a drain on budgets, but as investments in economic well-being, peaceful societies and social justice.

I welcome the strong nexus you will be exploring today between human security and health and I look forward to receiving the outcomes of your discussion.