

## Regional Briefing on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Region of the Americas

By the Pan American Health Organization/Regional Office of the World Health Organization  
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### A New Vision for the Future

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, establishing a groundbreaking approach to further strengthen global efforts and collaborative international action.<sup>1</sup> The eight MDGs were ground-breaking, in that they provided a common language to inspire a global commitment to development. In the fifteen years following their implementation, great progress was achieved, particularly in terms of health-related goals. In the Region of the Americas, many countries reached or surpassed goals to reduce child mortality, control infectious diseases, reduce poverty and increase access to improved water, sanitation, education, and infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> However, the favorable trends that were reflected in national and regional averages tended to mask persistent health and income inequalities within and across countries.

The unequal distribution of health and the emergence of new challenges in health helped redefine the global agenda. In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/70/1, “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.<sup>3</sup> The product of numerous consultations, the 2030 Agenda lays out an ambitious and universal plan of action for people, planet and prosperity for the next fifteen years. At the heart of the Agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets, and 232 indicators.<sup>4</sup> The broad scope and interconnectedness of these goals has

<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly. United Nations millennium declaration. 55th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 2000 Sept. 18 (A/Res/55/2). <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Millennium Development Goals and health targets: final report. 55th Directing Council, 68th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas, Washington, DC, 2016 Sept. 26-30 (CD55/INF/5).  
[http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=36108&Itemid=270](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=36108&Itemid=270).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations General Assembly. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 2015 Oct. 21 (A/Res/70/1).  
[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations. SDG Indicators: Revised list of global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.  
<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Official%20Revised%20List%20of%20global%20SDG%20indicators.pdf>.

the potential to transform the public health landscape by shifting policymaking priorities toward the intersecting social, economic, environmental, and political determinants of human development and population health. The 2030 Agenda calls on all countries to commit to and act on its implementation to ensure that all people can fulfill their potential to live in health and with dignity and equality.

The principles of 2030 Agenda have made the links between health and other aspects of development clearer than ever before. While the SDGs contain only one explicitly health-oriented goal – SDG 3, to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” – each of the other goals addresses issues that have important impacts on health. They range from continued efforts to fulfill the aims not met by the MDGs, to addressing significant challenges to achieve universal health coverage and emerging health and health-related issues, such as non-communicable diseases, environmental pollution, climate change, illicit drugs, migration, and road safety (Table 1).

Table1. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets identified by the World Health Organization for policymaking/resource allocation prioritization, 2016-2030<sup>5</sup>

<b>SDG Health Targets</b>	
3.1	Maternal mortality and births attended by skilled health personnel
3.2	Child mortality
3.3	HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, hepatitis, neglected tropical diseases
3.4	Non-communicable diseases and suicide
3.5	Substance abuse
3.6	Road traffic injuries
3.7	Sexual and reproductive health
3.8	Universal health coverage
3.9	Mortality due to air pollution; unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene; and unintentional poisoning
3.a	Tobacco use
3.b	Essential medicines and vaccines
3.c	Health workforce
3.d	National and global health risks
<b>SDG Health-Related Targets</b>	
2.2	Child stunting, and child wasting and overweight
6.1	Drinking water
6.2	Sanitation
7.1	Clean household energy
11.6	Ambient air pollution
13.1	Natural disasters
16.1	Homicide and conflicts

As a result, the SDGs represent an effective platform on which health-enabling policies can be built to benefit future generations. The central importance of health as an input to sustainable development signifies that the health sector must assume a leadership role in both achieving the targets under SDG 3 and promoting actions that target the determinants of health and support overall well-being. The most

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. World Health Statistics 2016: Monitoring Health for the SDGs. Geneva: WHO; 2016. [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/206498/1/9789241565264\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/206498/1/9789241565264_eng.pdf?ua=1).

forward-looking of institutions will grasp the opportunity presented by the SDGs to innovate and demonstrate a broader vision for development than that circumscribed by their individual institutional mandates.

### **Aims and Parameters of the SDGs**

The global development community continues to assess strategies, means, and resources to implement what is considered the UN's most inclusive and participatory process in its history. In order to address the complexity of the SDGs, collaborative and multisectoral work will be essential. In fact, SDG 17 specifically calls for strengthened global partnerships. This is not a stand-alone goal, but a catalyst at the core of all the goals.

Multisectoral approaches will be particularly relevant in light of the close links between health equity and powerful determinants of health outside the purview of the health sector, such as agriculture, taxation, urban zoning and transportation. The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted that equity is a key determinant of health, and likewise, that action on health is one of the most effective ways to promote equity.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this casual pathway, equity is clearly defined as a driving principle of 2030 Agenda. Taking these priorities into consideration, tackling challenges related to inequity and inequality in the Americas will require investment in health from sectors whose advocates may not currently perceive the value of health with respect to the wider socioeconomic development agenda.

### **PAHO's Role in Implementing the 2030 Agenda**

Over the next 13 years, countries are expected to use the SDGs' comprehensive approach to development to frame their agendas and political policies. To coordinate work on the SDGs and to ensure implementation is aligned across Regions, the WHO has established a global working group on the SDGs. All six WHO regions will participate in this working group as part of the global commitment to the 2030 Agenda, for which a work plan is currently being finalized.

Many of the 2030 Agenda's principles are well-aligned with the Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO) priorities and actions, which have been advanced by highlighting equity in PAHO's Strategic Plan 2014-2019 and mainstreaming the Cross-Cutting Themes of gender, ethnicity, human rights, and equity across all of PAHO's activities.<sup>7</sup> To this end, PAHO has made great efforts to guide the Region in the implementation of SDGs, particularly SDG 3. Complementing the synergy between PAHO's existing commitments and those presented by 2030 Agenda, PAHO has taken a series of concrete steps to actively participate in this new cycle of global commitment to sustainable development, making it relevant for countries as they develop their own plans.

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<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization. Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health. World Conference on Social Determinants of Health. Geneva: WHO; 2011.  
[http://www.who.int/sdhconference/declaration/Rio\\_political\\_declaration.pdf](http://www.who.int/sdhconference/declaration/Rio_political_declaration.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Strategic Plan of the Pan American Health Organization 2014-2019. 52nd Directing Council, 65th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas, Washington, DC, 2013 Sept. 3- Oct. 4 (Off. Doc. 345). <http://iris.paho.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/7654/CD53-OD345-e.pdf?sequence=16&isAllowed=y>.

### *Alignment with Existing Mandates*

A round table discussion and debate on the post-2015 agenda for sustainable development was organized at PAHO's 53rd Directing Council, held in October 2014, to determine the role of PAHO and its specific approach to SDG implementation. In this context, Member States requested the Pan American Sanitary Bureau to prepare a concept paper on how to achieve the SDGs and a document "comparing the targets and indicators of the SDGs with the targets and indicators of the Strategic Plan 2014-2019, the Health Agenda for the Americas and the current mandates of PAHO."<sup>8</sup> In response to Member States' requests, PAHO prepared a document, "Preparing the Region of the Americas to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goal on Health," and initiated a technical cooperation process with countries, with a view to compare and align SDG targets with current national health policies and programs.<sup>9</sup> This document makes clear that not only are the SDG targets fully in harmony with existing regional and global aims, but they will be mutually supportive.

### *National Consultations*

To ensure that PAHO's SDG-related activities are fully grounded in national and Regional priorities and circumstances, a series of national consultations have taken place both virtually and in-person. A regional workshop was held in Medellín, Colombia in November 2015 to enhance the capacities of PAHO Member States' country offices, health ministries, and other public institutions involved with the implementation of 2030 Agenda in the Americas. Approximately 50 technical officers, representing about 20 countries of the region, participated. These consultations provided an opportunity for dialogue between PAHO and country representatives on programmatic and technical resources for the implementation of 2030 Agenda with a health lens; a platform to share and cross-reference national experiences in achieving SDG targets related directly or indirectly to health; and a recognition of the need for an integrated, multisectoral strategy to address health inequities, such as Health in All Policies. In addition, PAHO has been working with several institutions in the Region to strengthen country capacity on the actual implementation of the SDGs across the region. A case in point is PAHO's collaboration with the Sustainable Development Solution Network and Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (FIOCRUZ), a Collaborating Center in Brazil.

### *Meeting of Collaborating Centers*

In September 2015, PAHO Collaborating Centers met to discuss the links between environmental health, the 2030 Agenda, and the significance of research in the field of environmental health to achievement of the SDGs. More recently, PAHO has developed and circulated an advanced draft of the document "Measuring Progress on Environmental Health through the Sustainable Development Goals," following a workshop to discuss environmental health indicators related to the SDGs. Several country profiles are now being prepared for countries throughout the Region, including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia and the United States.

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<sup>8</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Round Table on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda: Summary of the Discussion. 53rd Directing Council of PAHO, 66th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas; 2014 Sep 29–Oct 3; Washington, DC. Washington, DC: PAHO; 2014 (Document CD53/16, Add. II). [http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=27673&Itemid=270&lang=en](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=27673&Itemid=270&lang=en).

<sup>9</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Preparing the Region of the Americas to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goal on Health. Washington DC: PAHO; 2015. [http://iris.paho.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/10016/9789275118634\\_eng.pdf](http://iris.paho.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/10016/9789275118634_eng.pdf).

## *Health in All Policies*

Member States have called upon PAHO to assist in the implementation of the health responsibilities of 2030 Agenda and to promote multisectoral strategies required to effectively engage other sectors. Specifically, PAHO has taken a proactive approach in promoting Health in All Policies (HiAP), a collaborative approach that aims to improve health by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas. As a recognized leader for this initiative, PAHO was the first Regional Office to have adopted a Regional Plan of Action on HiAP, and has drafted a White Paper outlining options and opportunities for implementing HiAP at the local level.<sup>10, 11</sup> PAHO continued to implement the Plan of Action by convening an Expert Consultation on the Implementation of the Regional Plan of Action on HiAP. The final product, a road map for action in the Americas, recommends evidence-based opportunities and actions to develop and implement HiAP at all levels of government.<sup>12</sup>

Further to the Expert Consultation, PAHO established the Task Force and Working Group on HiAP and the SDGs. The groups met twice in 2015 to identify and optimize strategic priorities for engaging with other sectors in the context of the SDGs. Guiding documents on harmonizing the HiAP and SDGs agenda were developed, including a Concept Note and Reference Note.<sup>13,14</sup> Building capacity among government officials and relevant non-governmental organizations has also been identified as a major opportunity. To this end, a series of HiAP training workshops have been rolled out across several countries in the Region, designed to sensitize policymakers to the importance of the social determinants of health and the effectiveness of HiAP as a tool for achieving health equity. PAHO has also partnered with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) to develop a virtual course on HiAP and the SDGs, directed at PAHO/WHO Representatives, ministries of health, and relevant stakeholders. The course will highlight the relevance and importance of the SDGs for health, the interdisciplinary nature of the SDGs, and the need for a HiAP approach. It will also provide Regional context and complement PAHO's other initiatives to better support ministries of health in the implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and achievement of the SDGs.

## *Interagency Collaboration with the Organization of American States*

Among efforts to shift the global community's attention to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a five-year interagency collaboration (2016-2021) between PAHO and the Organization

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<sup>10</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Plan of action on health in all policies. 53rd Directing Council of PAHO, 66th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas; 2014 Sep 29–Oct 3; Washington, DC. Washington, DC: PAHO; 2014 (Document CD53/10, Rev. 1).

[http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=26797&Itemid=270&lang=en](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=26797&Itemid=270&lang=en).

<sup>11</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Health in All Policies: From the Local to the Global. Washington DC: PAHO; 2016. [http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=39950&Itemid=270](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=39950&Itemid=270).

<sup>12</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Road map for the Plan of Action on Health in All Policies. Washington, DC: PAHO; 2015. <http://iris.paho.org/xmlui/handle/123456789/31313>.

<sup>13</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Concept note: implementing the Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO) Regional Plan of Action on Health in All Policies (HiAP). Washington, DC: PAHO; 2015. [http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&Itemid=270&gid=30675&lang=en](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&Itemid=270&gid=30675&lang=en).

<sup>14</sup> Pan American Health Organization, Task Force and Working Group on Health in All Policies and the Sustainable Development Goals. Health in all policies and the Sustainable Development Goals: reference note. Washington, DC: PAHO; 2015. Online publication forthcoming.

of American States (OAS). This timely partnership aims to identify preliminary joint actions between the two agencies to guide and support Member States in the implementation and achievement of the SDGs, especially those goals outside the scope of the health sector. The first publication of this strategic alliance aligns each SDG with existing mandates and interagency collaborations, in order to identify existing means and mechanisms that will facilitate the translation of the 2030 Agenda's theories of equity and multisectoral collaboration into policies and processes that can generate positive outcomes for all. Beyond supporting national and regional action, the mapping aims to simplify coordination and reporting efforts on the part of national governments striving to achieve objectives under multiple international frameworks, and to more closely align the Inter-American and UN systems.

### *Universal Health Coverage*

Essential to implementation of SDG 3 is the mandate for Universal Health Coverage (UHC). PAHO's Strategy for Universal Access to Health and Universal Health Coverage puts the Region in a strong position to address this target.<sup>15</sup> The Strategy constitutes a call for action for the health sector to progressively expand integrated quality health services, and beyond the health sector in the implementation of health policies, plans, and programs that are equitable, efficient, and mindful of the differentiated needs of populations. As such, the Region and many Member States are well on their way in terms of implementation of the UHC target. For example, many countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean have expanded health services for poor and vulnerable populations by implementing an array of policies to increase the scope and equity of health programs. There has also been Regional progress in expanding health care services and resources to persons with disabilities, their families, and their caregivers.

### **Monitoring and Evaluating Progress**

#### *Development of Equity Profiles and Establishment of Health Observatories*

In an effort to generate quality evidence on health inequalities and to identify actions required to achieve a fairer distribution of health and well-being at the national level, PAHO and Member States are developing equity profiles across the Region. Using equity stratifiers as proxy indicators of the social determinants of health, including income, geographical location, education, sex and ethnicity, these equity profiles are able to locate health inequality gaps and gradients across the socio-economic spectrum. Likewise, in line with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, PAHO has intensified its technical cooperation efforts toward establishing several health observatories and strengthening national capacities to measure, analyze, and monitor social, economic, and environmental inequalities in health at the national and subnational levels. These core capacities will help Member States respond to equality-based indicators in PAHO's Strategic Plan 2014-2019 and to be accountable in "leaving no one behind".

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<sup>15</sup> Pan American Health Organization. Strategy for Universal Access to Health and Universal Health Coverage. 53rd Directing Council of PAHO, 66th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas; 2014 Sep 29–Oct 3; Washington, DC. Washington, DC: PAHO; 2014 (Document CD53/5, Rev. 2).  
[http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&Itemid=&gid=27631&lang=en](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&Itemid=&gid=27631&lang=en).

### *Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Region of the Americas*

To tackle the unequal distribution of health and underlying causes of poor health, robust data on the Region's most vulnerable sub-populations must be generated and made accessible. In May 2016, PAHO established the Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities. By gathering existing evidence, the Commission generates deeper understandings of the key drivers of health inequalities in the Americas: gender, ethnicity, human rights norms and standards, and social, economic, environmental, political and cultural determinants. Based on the principle of social justice and in line with both Regional priorities and global commitments to the 2030 Agenda, the Commission is a timely first step toward providing concrete recommendations for Member States to take action on various dimensions of inequality. The Commission last met in March 2017 in Colombia.

### *Regional Participation in the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development*

Member States of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) adopted resolution 700(XXXVI), establishing the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development.<sup>16</sup> Building on existing mechanisms, this body is responsible for systematically monitoring and reporting on progress and challenges related to the implementation of the entire 2030 Agenda at the regional level.

At the first meeting of the Forum, ECLAC presented the "Annual report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean".<sup>17</sup> Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela played a leading role in the Forum, having already presented voluntary reviews to the UN's High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2016, along with 11 other countries from the region that will do the same in 2017.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, funds, programs, and specialized agencies of the UN; international agencies and financial institutions; representatives of civil society, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders presented reports on initiatives linked to the SDGs. The conclusions from the Forum were sent to the HLPF on Sustainable Development, the global mechanism for follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, which will meet each July in New York. A joint progress report addressing challenges related to the 2030 Agenda in the Region of the Americas, developed by the United Nations Development Group for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNDG LAC), will also be presented at the upcoming HLPF for Sustainable Development. PAHO has actively participated in the development of both of these reports.

### *Network of Global Health Policy Think Tanks*

The Network of Global Health Policy Think Tanks, "THINK\_SDGS", engages with think tanks and country representatives to explore how country cooperation and global governance mechanisms can support local action to accelerate SDG implementation. The network also implements a series of national

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<sup>16</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 700(XXXVI) Mexico Resolution on the Establishment of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development. 23-27 May 2016. <http://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/document/files/700xxxvi-forum-ing.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Annual report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2017. <http://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2017/en/documents/annual-report-regional-progress-and-challenges-relation-2030-agenda-sustainable>.

<sup>18</sup> Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

workshops to showcase experiences across the Region. The next meeting, scheduled for July 2017, will specifically address the political dimensions of SDG implementation at the national level, with a view to identify best practices to catalyze political support for multisectoral programming and joint Regional collaborations in health.

#### *Development of a Roadmap to Achieve the SDGs*

In light of the challenges faced by countries in reporting under multiple frameworks, Member States recommended that PAHO develop a Roadmap to achieve SDG targets associated with health. As such, PAHO has developed an Organization-wide strategic approach to support Member States in achieving the SDGs. Based on the key principles of equity and sustainability, the institutional strategy uses innovation and multi-sectoral approaches to incorporate other sectors as partners. The Roadmap will lead to better inter-programmatic collaboration and coordination between programs and the SDG targets they address, particularly those related to health. It will also help establish a unified regional response, optimize national and regional development efforts, and avoid duplication, waste and multiple reporting structures that place an undue burden on Member States. Ultimately, the Roadmap maintains a central focus on country needs and priorities, as opposed to a broad-brush regional approach, and will require Country Cooperation Strategies (CCSs) to include health and health-related SDG targets at the national level. This is in-keeping with the new global CCS Guidelines from the WHO.

#### **Conclusions**

The 2030 Agenda offers a guiding vision for global and regional action for a sustainable and prosperous future, and its goals present unprecedented opportunities to promote health and reduce inequities by putting health at the center of public policy-making. In this way, the 2030 Agenda challenges the health sector to apply its remit in a visionary way that breaks the mold of the traditional health-centered programmatic approach by engaging with stakeholders across the spectrum of sustainable development.

Despite the certain challenges countries and sub-regions of the Americas will face in the process of achieving the SDGs, the Region of the Americas shares a wealth of experience in working across sectors to promote health and has demonstrated dedication to addressing health inequities. Moreover, PAHO will continue to provide Member States with critical technical expertise and guidance on implementing the SDGs. Throughout the ongoing implementation phase of the SDGs, PAHO and its partners seek to identify specific opportunities to encourage global, regional, national and local actors to use multisectoral approaches to reach the agreed targets. These efforts to translate a conceptual agenda into realistic and concrete actions mark the first of many strides to ensure the Region's unjust and avoidable inequities are adequately addressed for many generations to come.

The SDGs will continue to have important implications for PAHO's approach to promoting health and well-being in the global health community. The Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas, the highest-level strategic planning and policy framework in the Region is intended to articulate how the Region will achieve the health-related SDGs by 2030. Furthermore, PAHO's next Strategic Plan (2020-2025) will even more explicitly incorporate health and health-related targets into PAHO's corporate objectives. Capitalizing on these opportunities reflects not only PAHO's commitment to the 2030 Agenda, but an overarching belief that health is an indispensable contributor to a more sustainable and equitable world.