

Changing the World

The United Nations millennium development goals and sustainable development goals

Adriana Banozic

National University of
Singapore

Suzanne
Skevington

University of Manchester
Irina Todorova

Health Psychology Research
Center

At the ground-breaking Millennium Summit of the United Nations (UN) in 2000, the Member States adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which together aimed to address the needs of poor and vulnerable countries

and groups around the world. During the past 15 years these goals have been a guiding force for action and change for UN member states, and their duration expires at the end of 2015. Almost all the MDGs were directly or indirectly related to health and wellbeing, and many adopted a preventative approach. Most impressive has been the progress made towards eradicating poverty (MDG1) over the last 15 years. The numbers of people living in extreme poverty globally, who earned less than one dollar a day, has been reduced by half. Improving gender equality became a serious aim (MDG3) and primary education for all now approaches universal coverage. Progress has been made in reducing child mortality (MDG4) and improving maternal health (MDG5), despite some departures from the path. New cases of HIV infection have begun to decline (MDG6), but malaria and common diseases like tuberculosis - now on the increase - still require urgent concerted international action and investment. Ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG7) is key in the future agenda, in the wake of rising global concern about climate change. For further reading, you can find many documents related to the MDGs complied by

[Taylor and Francis](#) to mark the final year of these goals.

The MDGs were timetabled to be achieved by 2010, but the deadline was extended through to 2015, when a new Agenda was needed to close existing gaps and to take into account the needs of a rapidly changing world. By 2012, an experts meeting in Bellagio had refocused this new global initiative onto Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Prudently, these would be founded on the evident successes of the MDGs. While the MDGs primarily addressed the needs of developing low and middle income countries, the SDGs indicate that during the next 15 years, all countries worldwide should endorse and adopt these commitments and responsibilities. Sustainability is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The full SDG document was developed during a year of consultations, and was discussed during the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015, at UN Headquarters in New York. This was convened as a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly which on September 25th formally adopted the [Resolution](#) for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which also includes directions for implementation. The 193 Member States of the United Nations reached consensus about the Agenda which contains 17 SDGs, with 169 associated targets. These are outlined in the document: "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

[The Psychology Coalition at the United Nations](#) (PCUN) actively participated in the discussion of

psychological contributions to sustainable development, and to finalizing the SDG document. PCUN is composed of psychological societies and organizations accredited at the United Nations (UN), and psychologists affiliated with United Nations departments, agencies and missions. These include the American Psychological Association (APA), International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP), International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS), the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), and now also the European Health Psychology Society (EHPS). Coalition members collaborate in the application of psychological principles, science and practice, to global challenges on the UN agenda including those outlined in the MDGs and new SDGs. PCUN ensured the impact of psychology in the SDG discussions in several ways. One notable achievement was the inclusion of well-being in the title of SDG3, alongside health. It insisted on including for the first time a separate target for mental health in the SDG agenda; however this has remained as part of the target 3.4.

Health, Wellbeing and Resilience

The ambitious target of 'Ensuring good health and well-being for all and at all ages by 2030' (SDG3) remains a high priority among the new Sustainable Development Goals, following on from goals aiming for eliminating poverty and zero hunger. The tone of the SDG document is clear: 'No one must be left behind'. It addresses the needs of vulnerable people, including youths, older adults, disabled people, indigenous populations, those infected by HIV, refugees, migrants and internally displaced people. It also acknowledges the special needs of those facing complex humanitarian emergencies or affected by terrorism. Goal 3 adds a developmental feature, indicating how important it is to carry

out work across the lifespan in health and wellbeing, without age silos.

One of the new themes among the SDGs is the positive concept of resilience. SDG11 addresses 'making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. Although resilience is utilised in other disciplines to describe materials and the economy, psychological resilience of communities to physical and mental illness forms an integral part of the contemporary agenda of community health psychology. 'Bouncing back' from disaster is seen as strength. Building resilience as a preventative strategy offers an optimistic, practical alternative to the relief from suffering, disruption, and economic damage that arises from natural disasters due to climate change.

Inevitably the SDG targets will need to be followed-up and evaluated, but measuring MDG achievements was contentious. It is internationally acknowledged that it is important to develop new broader indicators of progress for the SDGs, and that these will need to be high quality, timely, and reliable. Applying advanced psychometric skills could be an asset in developing suitable health and well-being assessments, to ascertain whether unequivocally, Sustainable Development Goals have been met.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Millennial Developmental Goal 3 (MDG3) had a single aim of eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education. Achievement of that goal is being measured by gender ratios in school enrolment, paid employment and political participation of women in national parliaments. In many ways MDG3 had an undeniable effect on improving the status of women and girls around the world. Gender parity in primary schools has

Box 1: Sustainable Development Goals (2030)

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

almost been attained, UNDP reports 96 girls for every 100 boys enrolled between 2000 and 2010 around the globe. Some encouraging trends include improved maternal health, increased number of women in the labor market and progress in securing better education and training.

However, collective capacity of women to actively participate in decision making and to hold authorities accountable for their actions is still an ideal more than reality. On the global

front participation of women in the labor market (non-agricultural sector) has increased, from a global share of 35% in 1990 to 40% in 2012 including a 6% increase in the number of ministerial level positions held by women. Despite reports of a more prominent increase in female representation in parliaments of developing countries, globally, women still occupy less than a quarter of seats in parliament and 17% of all government ministerial posts.

These are only some of the indicators which

suggest a long road ahead. One of the main objections to the indicators embodied in MDG3 is that they too often served as token gestures asking governments to promote rather than achieve goals to expand women's choices and support empowerment of women and girls.

Sustainable development goal 5 (SDG5) is phrased more specifically in comparison to MDG3 with an emphasis on providing grassroots support to women that will ensure that they have skills and capabilities necessary to participate, monitor and make policy changes. SGD5 advocates for more access to assets and resources for women and challenges discriminatory laws and constitutions and protect women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Separate targets are indicated for each of the issues:

- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life

Some argue that the issue of actual participation of women in policy and decision making processes gained momentum because of the economic argument which suggests that gender inequality is negatively affecting economic growth.

There are also specific mentions of women's empowerment in other SDGs. SDG3 focuses on healthy lives and advocates for universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including family planning. SDG8 calls for equal professional opportunity for all women and men.

In SDG5 women's health issues are not mentioned specifically and are referenced in just

two targets. Women's reproductive rights are often a source of debate among different activist groups, however they are crucial for attaining any sustainable development. Being able to decide if and when to have children, not dropping out of school because of unwanted pregnancy or health risks due to unplanned pregnancies are associated with striking socioeconomic returns. For every dollar invested in contraception in developing regions the cost of pregnancy-related care including HIV care for women and newborns is reduced by 1.5 dollars. Beyond that, every girl that stays in school and delays childbirth is more likely to improve her participation in the labor force. In turn, living conditions improve and communities develop and grow when women fully participate.

It is crucial for policy and decision makers to understand that there is not going to be any poverty reduction or economic growth for that matter if half of the world population is lagging behind.

Conclusion

EHPS has been affiliated with the Division of Public Information/ NGO section at the United Nations since April 2011. This year, in April 2015, we had a major success when EHPS was accredited for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC). This means that we can have the potential for significant influence on global health and well-being policies. Additionally, in 2016 EHPS becomes a member of the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations (PCUN). We believe that our affiliation with PCUN will allow the EHPS to play a more active role in shaping UN policies and future goals related to several areas including but not limited to ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

We are looking forward to developing further

partnerships with the United Nations and the other professional psychological organizations affiliated with the UN. Please follow our updates on the European Health Psychologist and the [EHPS website](#). Look for an announcement for the health policy workshop at the 2016 EHPS Conference in Aberdeen convened by Alden Lai, and facilitated by Dr. Julie Barnett and Dr. Hannah Durrant, The Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath: "Engaging Policy with Research: Building a Bridge over Troubled Waters." It will explore venues and strategies that health psychologists can use in our overarching goal of making a significant impact on global health and well-being policies.



Adriana Banozic
National University of Singapore,
Diagnostic Radiology, Singapore
dnrba@nus.edu.sg



Suzanne Skevington
Manchester Centre for Health
Psychology, School of
Psychological Sciences, University
of Manchester, Manchester, UK
suzanne.skevington@manchester.ac.uk

Adriana Banozic
Suzanne Skevington
Irina Todorova

On behalf of the UN Committee at the EHPS



Irina Todorova
Health Psychology Research
Center, Sofia, Bulgaria
ilgt1@comcast.net