

and a parallel need for connected thinking in health education nowadays.

Leopold's "The Land Ethic" consolidated the modern conservation movement. At present, the global health movement is broad but ill defined, inspired by a sense of urgent purpose (staving off ill health around the world), but without the single, deeply internalised, central guiding principle that, according to Leopold, impels sustained societal commitment. Following Leopold, we advocate for a global health ethic that not only galvanises the world's efforts, but also does so by inspiring "an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions".

Despite its profundity, "The Land Ethic" remains principally a literary achievement; the philosophical aspiration at its core has not, as Leopold hoped, transformed society. Near the end of his essay, Leopold presciently writes, "Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land." We admit that, in the present, resource-limited, hypereconomised world, our plea for a new ethical norm to guide global health might seem quixotic. Even so,

each and every one of us, individually and through our relationships, will experience an intense consciousness of health—whether we live in a city in Africa or the woods of Wisconsin. Perhaps this shared reality might yet inspire the development of a global health ethic that all of society eventually embraces.

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## Governance for planetary health and sustainable development

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The landmark report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on Planetary Health<sup>1</sup> is a clear and compelling articulation of the inextricable link between human health and environmental change. The report explores an array of complex, interlinked elements of concern, from environmental tipping points to the impacts of invasive species and the importance of protected areas. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recognises planetary health as critical to achieving sustainable development across the economic, social, and environmental spheres—this ethos underpins our Strategic Plan for 2014–17.<sup>2</sup>

The Commission's report comes at an important time. It is released just before the UN General Assembly is due to adopt the post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is just one of four major global processes this year. Disaster risk reduction, financing for development, and climate change are also being tackled at major summits.

Agreements in all these areas should encourage UN entities to "strengthen their collaborative mechanisms to ensure optimum coherence in tackling the threats to planetary health", as The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on Planetary Health notes.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, decision making and accountability at international and national levels would be enhanced by following through on the recommendations of the Commission.

Implementing the Commission's comprehensive action framework to safeguard planetary and human health requires strengthening resilience and governance capacity. This objective is reflected in the proposed SDGs. Individual, community, and institutional strengths must be built on to prevent, mitigate the impacts of, and learn from shocks of any type—internal or external, natural or man-made, economic, health-related, political, or social. Strengthened resilience to such challenges needs improved governance capacities for implementing

long-term, innovative, and multisectoral risk reduction. Public institutions will need to become more effective, accountable, and responsive to the needs of all, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

The Commission highlights multiple influences on planetary and human health, many of which relate to governance, including international trade and domestic policies that have an adverse effect on human and environmental health. Whole of government approaches can build countries' capacity to participate effectively in bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations to advance social, economic, and environmental interests together.

Strong intersectoral governance helps policy makers understand how economic, social, and environmental policies jointly impact on health, and vice versa. Trade-related laws and policies, combined with domestic tax regimes and regulation, can serve to maintain access to quality, affordable health technologies, or disincentivise demand for alcohol, tobacco, refined sugars, and ultra-processed foods. As the Commission points out, these products harm the health of the planet and its people. Their production results in higher greenhouse gas emissions, land use change, and agrochemical pollution. There is a large opportunity for progress in this area. In 2013, only 3% of countries had taxes on high-fat foods.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, the International Monetary Fund estimates that fossil fuel industry subsidies in 2015 amount to US\$5.3 trillion.<sup>4</sup>

Another governance priority is to encourage the private sector to protect the environment and human health as part of doing business. Private sector enterprise and economic growth need not come at the cost of the environment and public health. UNDP's work to integrate HIV and gender-related issues into environmental impact assessments of large-scale capital projects in 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa is an example of how economic and social objectives can be integrated into business design.<sup>5</sup> Future work will address malaria prevention and control and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Given the links between inequities, poor health, and development, making capital projects health-sensitive and ensuring that their benefits are accrued by all can advance inclusive economic growth and sustainable human development.

The recent outbreak of Ebola virus disease in west Africa, which the Commission cites as a powerful example of the immediate and alarming health impacts of environmental changes, is a powerful reminder of the weaknesses of



UNDP Sudan/Mohamed Bashir

siloed, sector-based governance. Strengthening systems for health and decentralised governance is essential to build resilient communities and prevent and mitigate the impact of health crises. Future responses to health and other crisis must invest more in supporting communities as agents for response and recovery, while engaging other sectors such as communications, banking,<sup>6</sup> and transport.

UNDP is playing its part in these endeavours. Since 2010, we have helped more than 150 countries to scale up climate change adaptation; manage ecosystems and biodiversity; improve water and oceans' governance; introduce affordable, accessible, and clean energy solutions; and manage chemicals and waste sustainably.<sup>7</sup> In all of its work, UNDP believes that empowering communities to identify solutions and scale up local innovations is an effective way of supporting improved health and sustainable development. In Sudan, for example, UNDP is helping communities to address climate risks and food security. Incomes among the 20 000 beneficiaries in one initiative—more than half in women-headed households—have increased by 20%, helping to improve education and health outcomes and natural resource stewardship in their communities.<sup>8</sup>

The report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on Planetary Health reminds us that sustainable development requires holistic approaches. Advancing social, economic, and environmental goals together—underpinned by resilient systems and improved governance—is at the heart of the proposed new SDGs and UNDP's work. Now is the time to act. The health of all people and our planet depends on that.

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