

Health and Development: An Introduction

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Good quality affordable health is crucial and central to human well-being and happiness. In general, healthy people live longer, are more productive, and contribute more to their households and society. India is undergoing a rapid and unprecedented health transition in recent decades. We are faced with the huge burden of infectious diseases, unsafe pregnancies, and malnourishment on one side and the growing incidences of non-communicable and costly-to-treat diseases on the other. Considerable disparities still persists between social groups and across the regions/states in India wherein the most disadvantaged sections reporting the worst health conditions. Added to this, another challenge is the widening gender disparities in health status and utilization of health services. Despite the considerable improvement over the decades in the provision of primary healthcare services to the rural and remotest areas of this vast nation, inequalities by socio-economic classes continue as an unfinished agenda. This may be attributed to a range of social, economic and political factors which determines the distribution and accessibility of healthcare. Efficient allocation of health resources across regions and communities is required to ensure the availability of basic healthcare services to all and needy.

For a healthy life, individuals also require clean environment, safe drinking water, sanitation, etc. Impact of better health has direct implications for poverty reduction and similarly, elimination of poverty will also strongly impact the health status of the population. Policies and laws have a pivotal role in realizing the health rights of a nation as it responds to the health needs, adequate provision of healthcare, and facilitates equitable access to services. The new National Health Policy-2017 reiterates the commitment of the government "for the attainment of highest possible level of health and wellbeing for all at all ages, through a preventive and promotive healthcare orientation in all development policies, and universal access to good quality healthcare services without anyone having to face financial hardship as a consequence". It also states that "this would be achieved through increasing access, improving quality, and lowering the cost of healthcare delivery". Towards achieving this, we need to reinforce

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