

PART D | The wider health context

The 1978 Alma Ata Declaration recognized that the goal of ‘Health for All’ would be achieved only by addressing the underlying social, economic and environmental determinants of health. Simply improving health care services would not be enough on their own, but health care professionals and health care systems could facilitate and promote action for health in a wide range of different sectors.

Part D of the *Global Health Watch* demonstrates why this approach is needed by discussing the profound health impacts of lack of access to water and education, conflict, food insecurity and environmental degradation, particularly climate change.

Despite the diversity of topics covered, there are several points of convergence. For instance, it is invariably the health of poorer and more vulnerable groups that is worst affected by changes in people’s external environments or in services that sustain health. Rapid climate change will hit the poorest hardest; conflict damages the fragile coping strategies of vulnerable households; and the privatization of water and education services increases poverty.

The need to reduce inequities through a strong public sector response in health-sustaining services mirrors that required in the health care sector itself. Key services around the world have been affected by constraints put on public expenditure.

The growing power of the corporate sector is evident in the chapters on food security and climate change – the activities of unregulated and uncontrolled big business threaten to ruin still further the environments and diets of whole countries. Once again, stronger international and national regulation of markets is urgent and desperately needed.

Policy dilemmas thrown up by the informal and formal commercialization of water and education services are similar. All the chapters cite the need to challenge the attempts of big corporations to capture lucrative markets, concerns that are common to many issues explored in Section B of this report. These similarities suggest that NGOs, civil society movements (and policy-makers) involved in all these different fields need to work together more.

What kind of world lets the desire for profit undermine the very possibility of human existence itself? The kind of world that lets conflicts large and small continue to claim so many lives. Many governments and businesses in

both North and South are complicit in diverting money, people and materials towards building arsenals of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons that could obliterate the world and all life many times over. The chapter on conflict, however, is not despairing: it calls for a 'culture of peace' and suggests that promoting health and equity is key to reducing conflict worldwide.

In recent years, the annual World Social Forums have been gatherings of a multitude of NGOs from different sectors with wide-ranging campaigns. The relevance and rationale of bringing such groups together is apparent when looking at the different sectors through a health lens – they all share a common agenda of democratizing the global political economy; redistributing wealth and power; strengthening the role and accountability of governments; and reining in the excesses of corporate activity.