

About this book

Today's global health crisis reflects widening inequalities within and between countries. As the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, advances in science and technology are securing better health and longer lives for a small fraction of the world's population. Meanwhile children die of diarrhoea for want of clean water, people with AIDS die for want of affordable medicines, and poor people in all regions are increasingly cut off from the political, social and economic tools they can use to create their own health and well-being.

The real scandal is that the world lacks neither funds nor expertise to solve most of these problems. Yet the predominance of conservative thinking and neoliberal economics has led the institutions that were established to promote social justice into imposing policies and practices that achieve just the opposite. They police an unjust global trade regime with a doctrinaire insistence on privatization of public services, and preside over the failure to curb disease by tackling the poverty that enables it to flourish.

Global Health Watch 2005–2006 is a collaboration of leading popular movements and non-governmental organizations comprising civil society activists, community groups, health workers and academics. It has compiled this alternative world health report – a hard-hitting, evidence-based analysis of the political economy of health and health care – as a challenge to the major global bodies that influence health. Its monitoring of institutions including the World Bank, the World Health Organization and UNICEF reveals that while some important initiatives are being taken, much more needs to be done to have any hope of meeting the UN's health-related Millennium Development Goals.

The report also offers a comprehensive survey of current knowledge and thinking in the key areas that influence health, focusing throughout on the health and welfare of poor and vulnerable groups in all countries. These issues range from climate change, water and nutrition to national health services and the brain drain of health professionals from South to North.

Global Health Watch 2005–2006 is above all a call for action, written in a clear, accessible style to appeal to grass-roots health workers and activists worldwide, as well as to international policy-makers and national decision-makers. Its resource sections advocate actions everyone can take, while its recommendations show how better global health governance and practice could work for Health for All rather than health for the privileged few.

'A very good reference work for people working in areas affecting the health of populations. It deals with some of the most important issues in today's world. I highly recommend it.' – *Vicente Navarro, Editor-in-Chief, International Journal of Health Services*

'Combines academic analysis with a call to mobilize the health professional community to advocate for improvements in global health and justice. I hope it will be read by many health professionals in rich and poor countries alike.' – *Professor Andy Haines, Director, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine*

'Governments and intergovernmental organizations have structured our social world so that half of humankind still lives in severe poverty. These global poor suffer vast health deficits due to inadequate nutrition and lack of access to health care, safe drinking water, and clean sewage systems. Each year, some 18 million of them, including 10 million children under 5, die from preventable or treatable medical conditions – accounting for one third of all human deaths ... This greatest moral outrage of our time will continue until citizens reflect on its causes and firmly place the human rights of the global poor on the political agenda. *Global Health Watch 2005–2006* is a courageous and promising effort in this direction.' – *Thomas Pogge, Professorial Research Fellow, Centre for Applied Philosophy, Australian National University*

'*Global Health Watch 2005–2006* offers a critique of global trends that threaten health including the practices of multinational corporations, the false promise of the genetics revolution, the scandal of hunger in a world of plenty and the failure of UN institutions such as WHO to live up to their original mission to promote the health of poor people. *Global Health Watch* shows clearly that whether we are healthy or not is deeply rooted in our political, economic and social structures. More important, it also demonstrates, with practical suggestions, that another world is possible. It will become the essential guidebook for health activists who want to campaign for a kinder, more equitable, healthier and people-centred world.' – *Fran Baum, member of the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health*

'A much-needed resource, unique, and reflecting the work of well-qualified authors from all continents. I applaud the effort – and the result.' – *Philip R. Lee, MD, Consulting Professor, Stanford University*

Global Health Watch 2005–2006

An alternative world health report

People's Health Movement

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Foreword

New reports on different aspects of the state of the world's health appear daily. International and national organizations of all kinds produce vast amounts of data, statistics and analysis. But what is lacking in this flood of information is honest and transparent assessment of the actions and policies that affect health and health inequalities, for good or ill, presented in a format that is accessible and understandable by health workers and civil society groups. How far do all the health projects, programmes, technical cooperation, aid and loans actually improve the health of poor people round the world? And how far do the actions of transnational corporations, global financial institutions and international trade rules undermine it?

Recognizing this, the People's Health Movement, the Global Equity Gauge Alliance and Medact came together in 2003 to plan a review of the performance of the very institutions that normally write global reports. It was time to turn the tables by reporting and assessing the actions of international health agencies such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF, donor agencies, rich country governments, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. It was time to produce an alternative world health report that would highlight the root causes of poor health and reveal the gap between humanitarian rhetoric and reality.

This first edition of the *Global Health Watch* is the result, designed to create a joint platform for civil society organizations and individuals working in health and health-related sectors, including gender discrimination, global trade environmental protection, access to water and food, the arms trade, the peace movement and disaster relief. *Global Health Watch 2005–2006* has achieved this, and we hope to continue and improve the collaboration between these actors.

The report has limitations. We tried to involve people from as many countries as possible, but lacked adequate input from many regions, including the Middle East and China. Many key issues relevant to health are covered, but not everything of importance. With a limited budget and a tiny secretariat, we were simply unable to cover everything. What we have created, however, is the prototype of an instrument to 'watch' how international and national governments, agencies, banks, corporations, rules and structures act and perform in improving or worsening health and health inequities. This edition does not

provide a complete report on all the relevant events and institutions, but it is a foundation for subsequent Watches.

It is now time to start preparing for the next *Global Health Watch* in 2007. What will be said then about the key role and performance of WHO and other global health bodies? Will they be able to improve their performance while the United States continues to attack the multilateral institutions? Will the tobacco companies have found ways to undermine the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control? Will the World Bank still be undermining public health systems while trumpeting its commitment to poverty alleviation? What will have been the impact of humanitarian and development efforts in areas affected by the 2004 tsunami? And what will health and the health system be like in Iraq?

Politicians, governments, donor and humanitarian agencies, banks and multilateral institutions need to be held accountable. They need to be praised when they do well; told when they fail; and exposed when they consciously contribute to the problem. Independent evaluation of the role of civil society should also, perhaps, be included in future. Meanwhile we hope this report marks the beginning of an ongoing process to improve accountability in the international system, and contributes to our wider goal of Health for All as a right.

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