

OCTOBER 2016 RESEARCH REFLECTION:

A healthier world? Individual responsibility within a global initiative.

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This year the United Nations have set seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as part of their 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next fifteen years the member countries will “mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.” The goals call for action by all countries, and recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while also tackling climate change and environmental protection (www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment).

I was interested to find out more about how youth had been involved in the process of establishing these goals, and I came across the article *Facilitating health and wellbeing is “everybody’s role”: youth perspectives from Vanuatu on health and the post-2015 sustainable development goal agenda* referenced below. The authors make the case that it is imperative that the viewpoints of vulnerable or marginalised populations, in regard to their own health needs, are captured and included in debates about the SDGs. They suggest that little is known about young people’s health needs, except in high-income countries. Their project, looking at youth in Vanuatu, addresses this gap in knowledge and emphasises the need for every community to have their say about their own unique cultural, economic and environmental context. This youth voice is imperative for dialogues of global importance, not to mention for health policy development more generally. The article outlines the essential needs identified by young people in Vanuatu, following four main themes: youth definitions of ideal health, unhealthy lifestyle choices, health worker shortage and responsibility for good health.

The article includes many direct quotes from the participants, giving a very good insight into the situation in these remote Pacific islands. These young people recognised that while their health and wellbeing begin with the choices they make as individuals, their quest to achieve and maintain good health often encounters obstacles beyond their control. Participants advocated for the need for all people locally and globally to take responsibility for a healthier world. This is “everybody’s role”.

I still remember the first essay that I wrote as a Social Work student, eleven years ago: “Discuss how the three P’s of Social Work (personal, professional and political) are likely to shape your thinking and actions”. It was the political aspect and the debates about the “dual purpose” of social work, the “dichotomy of private troubles and public causes,” that made me most excited about becoming a social worker. This is a socialist-collectivist argument that proposes that rather than helping people adjust to society, social workers should act to change the fundamental structures that are the origin of most people’s problems. Now, having been a social worker for some time, I can acknowledge that while ideologically my ideas are socialist, I also recognise the importance of empowering clients to solve their immediate problems. I see



the need to intervene at both a personal and a structural level. Reading this research paper rekindled this passion in me for social justice. It is encouraging to see that the main theme of the article, that health and wellbeing is “everybody’s role”, is reflected in the SDGs and the message that this is a global initiative. Groups of people such as youth in developing countries must have their voices and ideas heard: this challenge will remain. Going back to the three Ps of Social Work, personally the article was a reminder that we all have a role to play as individuals [file://localhost/\(see http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/takeaction:\)](http://localhost/(see http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/takeaction:).). Professionally it was a reminder of the importance that research is important for getting these views heard, and that in my role as social worker I must continue to advocate that policy incorporates these ideas. Politically we should all continue to investigate and understand the ways in which poverty and inequalities impact on people, and work together to change this situation, as it really is “everybody’s role”.

References

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