



## Development and health: keeping hope alive in the midst of irrationality

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The prevailing idea of “development” has oriented the emergence of nations since the middle of the twentieth century. The purpose: to assure that the benefits of scientific advances and industrial progress of rich countries are available for underdeveloped areas as well (Sachs 2010). However, every socio-ecosystem today, specially those with vulnerable communities, are met with crisis and conflict directly or indirectly related to environmental deterioration, social injustice and extreme poverty. The connections between these issues and our development models are particularly profound, difficult to engage and are reflected in every sector of welfare and public policy, including of course and in a very special manner: health.

The analysis of current development models requires an understanding of the historical processes that preceded the critical situation of the twenty first century, in particular that which relates to the preponderance of postwar developmentalist and capitalist visions, the fall of the second world (high revenue non-capitalist nations), the erosion of the welfare state and the new versions of transnational colonialism with stark inequalities between the north and the south (Escobar 2011).

The implications of these historical contexts in the public policies of our countries are reflected in the conditions of life of most of the planet’s inhabitants and other living things. Today more than ever we have concentration of wealth in smaller elites, endangered and extinct species, segregation and violence between nations and towards

ethnic and cultural minorities, morbidity and mortality by preventable diseases, unbridled growth leading to the deterioration of non-renewable resources, global climate change with extreme weather phenomena, accelerated urban growth and abandonment of the countryside, and we’re just scraping the surface of our present world’s most renowned problems.

In health, as in education and in other basic welfare sectors, there is a model advancing in a global fashion in which the rules of the market prevail over the right to life and social justice. The last decades of public health policy in particular have centered on a medicalized vision with services mediated by economical transactional relationships, inefficiency and heightened corruption, underemployed health workers, dismemberment of the attention network and financial instability in the sector.

A change is not only necessary but imminent, and it does not seem viable without modifying the way we conceive and create possible alternatives to the predominant development model. The former implies different ways of relating to one another and with our ecosystem. It also implies thinking and taking action to put a stop to wasteful and unconscionable economic growth in order to give new forms of life a chance to happen (*buen vivir*) (Gudynas 2011), considering incommensurable values in terms of economic resources and democratic and deliberative local processes with empowered communities participating in the decision making.

The role of academia is in helping to understand the complexity of these relationships and their impacts on population health, and in contributing towards building and evaluating participative and innovative alternatives. In order to contribute to this effort, the School of Public Health of the Universidad del Valle hosted the Second Latin American Public Health Conference September 1st

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through 3rd of 2016 in Cali, Colombia, with the main theme being “Development and Health”.

The papers published in this special issue of the IJPH entitled ‘Development and Public Health’ engage in this subject. They cover several important issues: the effects of informal work and unemployment on well-being and their interactions with gender, the association of poverty with risky behaviors in adolescents, new tools to analyze intersectoral interventions, a review of health systems decentralization and the examination of effects of the extractive industry in Latin America.

In spite of massive tendencies that insist on the current model, we expect to contribute to some rational hope and

to building not only development alternatives but alternatives to development.

## References

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