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Book Reviews/Recension

Fatal Indifference: The G8, Africa and Global Health

Ron Labonte and Ted Schrecker, with David Sanders and Wilma Meeus. Ottawa, Ontario: The University of Cape Town Press and International Development Research Centre, 2004; 378 pp.

Fatal Indifference presents a "report card" for critical monitoring of the health implications of G8 country actions, or "(in)actions" on health. The message one takes from this book is that G8 commitments to health and development are often broken, and that in many cases the commitments are not sufficient to address the enormity of the problems faced by poor countries. The book provides evidence that within the context of 'globalization' or 'liberalization', there has been an evident slowdown in development progress. The analysis is of key texts of commitments made at the G8 summits in Cologne (1999), Okinawa (2000) and Genoa (2001).

The book begins with an introduction clearly describing the measures used, the analytic framework, and the limitations of the analysis. The first chapter outlines the nature of globalization and its relationship with health and development. It is here that the authors explain their perspective of the G8 countries as the emerging centre of global governance, backed by economic influence. The subsequent seven chapters each examine a separate area of G8 policy commitments and their relationship to health (e.g., macroeconomic policy, structural adjustment and debt relief; official development assistance; trade and market access).

The book will be of interest to a wide array of scholars/activists working in global health and the determinants of health. It successfully draws the linkages between the various determinants of health (health, education, nutrition

and economics) and the effect of policies and programs on the determinants. While it would likely be understandable to even the novice reader because it provides clear definitions, descriptions and a framework for the analysis, the evidence presented is a bit dense for the uninitiated. The book is well written and organized and makes effective use of specific examples in boxes that fit smoothly within the overall text of each chapter. The presentation of evidence in tables and graphs is clear and helpful to understanding of the text. There is an extensive list of references provided, and appendices provide more detailed information.

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The Combined Approach Matrix: A Priority Setting Tool for Health Research

A. Ghaffar, A. de Francisco, & S. Matlin (Eds.). *Global Forum for Health Research*. 2004; 68 pp.

In 1990, the Commission on Health Research for Development stated that less than 10% of global research funds, from public and private sources, are directed to 90% of the world's health problems. In response, the basic thesis of *The Combined Approach Matrix* is that changing the priorities that determine how existing health research funds are used can rectify this 10/90 gap. The authors discuss the challenges associated with priority setting, both in terms of the processes involved and tools used. They present a tool, the Combined Approach Matrix (CAM), developed by the Global Forum on Health Research, to assist institutions (at the national, regional and global levels) in setting priorities in health research. The matrix is composed of previously developed criteria and prin-

ciples that are linked to stakeholders and determinants of population health status. One axis of the matrix provides a five-step methodology (linking disease burden, with determinants, cost-effectiveness and financial flows) while the other axis recognizes the non-biomedical influencing factors on health (individual and community behaviour, governmental/macroeconomic policies, agriculture, transportation, etc.)

The strength of this publication is in its application of the CAM model to different jurisdictions (global, national), diseases, risk factors and vulnerable target groups – thus showing how it can combine a diverse range of health-related factors to set priorities in research. Practical challenges are identified as data collection (e.g., not available) and/or transforming data into meaningful information (e.g., consistent format). The document also provides a brief understanding of how the CAM can be tailored to accommodate other challenges (e.g., using the CAM to highlight the most important gaps in information needed for decision-making). A limitation of the publication is that its discussion remains at a fairly conceptual level. Even the applications include only the fundamentals of the Matrix at work. Further, while the importance of an institution's underlying values to priority setting is acknowledged, they are not openly included in the matrix. Therefore, the manual provides insufficient concrete detail for more than a broad understanding of the tool. Nevertheless, this publication can serve as a useful tool to build awareness (among policy-makers, academics and providers) and in identifying essential factors for consideration to effect real change in priority setting with respect to health research.

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