



DEBATE AND ACTION ABOUT THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

THE POSITION OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS

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Faced with the multidimensional crisis affecting the world, the civil society movements and organizations propose some ideas to contribute to the debate about the social determination of health. Because the dynamics of the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health did not allow us sufficient space to express our ideas, we would like to summarize our position in this document.

We value the initiative of the Brazilian people and their government to promote and finance this CMDSS in accord with their commitment to the right to health. Nevertheless we must still discuss ways to end the precarious and shameful social and public health inequities that characterize the world panorama. We must find bridges that unite us, social movements and governments, to promote life and health.

For more than two decades almost all the countries of Latin America have been the victims of unsustainable neoliberal experiments, with deadly consequences for their people. Today there is growing indignation and protest in other countries from people who are the victims of similar measures.

It is time to openly discuss that which we have repeatedly avoided. The social determination of health is much more than a collection of fragmented and isolated “determinants” that, from a reductionist viewpoint, are associated with classic risk factors and individual lifestyles. We must not allow the concept of social determinants of health to become banal, co-opted or reduced merely to smoking, sedentary behavior and poor nutrition, when what we need is to recognize that behind those symptoms and effects lies a social construction based on the logic of a globalized hegemonic culture whose ultimate goal is the commercialization of life itself.

Let's call things by their real names

The central problem: The cause of the inequalities within and between nations is the capitalist economy in its neoliberal form, infused with an exclusively speculative desire for unlimited profit. Capitalism based on the domination of the few over the many and the plundering of nature is the cause of the immense financial, energy, food and ethical crises that we face today. Likewise it is this capitalist system that has led to the precariousness of work, the loss of labor rights, the destruction of solidarity among workers, and has pushed millions of people into the informal economy and profoundly increased child labor.

The commercialization of life: Goods produced by overproduction do not solve collective necessities, and are unequally distributed. Millions of people could benefit from all that is produced in the world: goods, clothing, medicine: enough for all of us to live well. There are abundant resources for all the species that inhabit the earth; but the logic of the market prevents people from obtaining what they need.

Measures that don't work: In its desperation and insecurity, capitalism grabs profits and socializes losses, resorting to new and more cruel neoliberal measures that further reduce the fundamental social rights of people. The most powerful nations justify and start wars that are never fought in their own territory, but in other lands where there are resources to exploit.

Who has the power? The expansion of neoliberal hegemony is based on maintaining regional, national and transnational economic and social orders that have an interest in globalizing a particular vision of development that allows a progressive and accelerating concentration of profits. In the

area of public health, this hegemonic power translates into the commercialization of life, legal protections for intellectual property for the benefit of the medical industrial complex, control of the media in order to create “need” through shock, damage to public health systems, manipulation of civil society, multiple forms of violence and other sordid strategies to colonize the collective thought.

The current dominant societal model is not unique or definitive, and it is not sustainable. If everyone tried to live the “American way of life,” we would need the resources of at least five planet earths. Indigenous peoples have given us the wisdom of “vivir bien” (living well) in a community of solidarity where we complement one another with regard to the diversity of cultures, knowledge, feelings ways of living in solidarity with nature and the cosmos, and being happy without competing to be better than the other or wanting more just for the sake of more.

All hands, all. All voices, all

- Let us reclaim the transforming strength and the integral nature of the concept of the social determination of health, through investigation, diffusion of information and collective mobilization.
- Let us establish global alliances between progressive governments and social movements, in order to confront the neoliberal beast that seeks to pay its costs on the backs of the people. Let us do this in order to create sovereignty in the production of the goods on which life depends.
- Let us especially join the young people around the world, who are the heirs and indispensable actors of the transformations that the future demands, beginning today.
- Let us defend “living well” as an essential paradigm for a new model of development.
- Let us demand the commitment of WHO to the defense of health. The people will reject any reform that opens the door to negotiation and privatization of collective rights.
- Let us revive the recommendations of the SDH Commission, especially those that refer to the struggle against the unjust distribution of power, money and resources.
- Let us question the contemplative and charitable view of poverty as an inevitable part of the picture, occasionally annoying, but useful most of the time to the dominant system that maintains its status quo while providing some “basic services,” “packages,” “insurance” and “basic minimums.”
- Let us support the creation and consolidation of health systems and social security systems that are universal, free, integral, and public; with coverage for all people for all services.
- Let us confront racism, discrimination and all forms of exclusion. Let us incorporate multiculturalism and fairness (especially with regard to gender and persons with disabilities) as central principles of all policies and proposals for action.
- Let us take a firm stand against any proposal to commercialize human life.
- Let us work with a humanist perspective that is critical, popular and against hegemony - not only in the health sector but in other aspects of society.
- Let us promote social participation in which people discuss the model of development and society, and decide the type of state and democracy as an expression of sovereignty and popular power.

We need more than good will. Let us search for alternatives. The worst scenario that could result from this WSCDH and from the Rio Declaration would be to build a supposed consensus that the social determinants of health could be anything, and in the end become meaningless. Our peoples demand solutions, not empty words. They deserve no less. Now is the time.