



African Contributions to Global Health

Video Transcript

What is global health?

The concept of global health seems to be simple: health that is considered in a global context. However, there are many definitions of global health. Let us consider three examples:

Global health is "Public health somewhere else"

"The emerging discipline of healthcare delivery in improvised settings"

"Health and disease patterns in terms of the interaction of global, national and local forces, processes, and conditions in political, economic, social and epidemiological domains"

You will find further definitions attached to this step. Reading these definitions, you will notice that they bring together various elements. Global health is understood as a condition, an aim, a field of work and a field of research. This is very universal. One way or another, we are all part of global health. As you follow this course, you are part of global health as a field of research.

The definitions include a spatial element. Public health focuses on the national and international health on the binational. Global health concentrates on issues that concern the planet as a whole.

The concept of global health doesn't just have a spatial dimension; it also has a temporal one. Viewed from a historical perspective, international health emerged from the field of colonial and tropical medicine. International health is the study of health in countries other than one's own, especially if the countries are representatives of the developing world. In the 20th century, international health was concerned with the control of epidemics and infectious diseases. Global health focuses on people's health needs beyond national borders worldwide in a global perspective.

A situation becomes the focus of global health when it affects people worldwide -- as we witnessed with the spread of Covid-19. Global health involves the crossing of borders, as this map of the spread of the virus impressively shows.



In the constitution of the World Health Organization, health is defined as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Thus, "global health" is understood as "holistic".

Globalisation has allowed people to engage with one another in "one world", in a social space. This "one world" replaces smaller geographical units such as nations, countries or regions. The rise of globality brought the spread of supraterritorial processes and connections with it whose impacts cannot be located to territorial units. Consider climate change or pandemics. They occur at the same time worldwide, at one place at one time. Causes and consequences cannot be located to individual territories. That is why global health is supraterritorial.

We can neither work nor do research on global health without considering historical developments. We need to know the burdens and legacies that global health is confronted with. One example is the gender and high-income bias in global health. The Global Health 50/50 report 2020, for instance, shows that more than 70% of the leaders in the sample of 200 global health organisations are men. 80% of these leaders are nationals of High-Income Countries, and more than 90% were educated in High-Income Countries. The report concludes that the current system is "neither fair nor fit-for-purpose". It recommends that "the health and well-being of people around the world will benefit from -- and require -- diverse leadership."

Another problem was raised by a report called "Delivered by Women, led by Men", which the World Health Organization released in 2019. The analysis of the gender and equity Global Health and Social Workforce showed that 7 out of 10 social healthcare workers are women. This imbalance shows that global health also has an important historical component, carrying with it the legacies of the past.

In summary, the word "global" in "global health" means: worldwide, border-crossing, holistic, supraterritorial, and, last but not least, historical.