The Centre on Global Health Security at Chatham House is engaging leading thinkers in a process of dialogue, research and analysis on the future of the global health system.

Changing health needs
During the past 20 years there has been major progress in terms of public health across the world. Life expectancy has increased and many more people live healthy lives. However, major needs remain, and in many places inequalities in economic status and health have increased.

A new landscape
Parallel to the health improvements, there has been economic growth across large parts of the developing world. Many countries have moved from low- to middle-income status. Human and institutional capacity has improved substantially in most countries. Development assistance for health increased sharply in the first decade of the 21st century, but this trajectory is not likely to hold. Domestic resources are, on the contrary, increasing steadily. This has contributed to changing relationships between countries.

The dynamics between national governments and international partners could continue to evolve in favour of domestic ownership, leadership, resources and capacity. In addition, the private sector is set to become an even more significant player, particularly given the drivers of non-communicable diseases.

The system of international cooperation on global health has largely evolved in an ad hoc manner. New global health initiatives have proliferated over the past 20 years, often created, funded and operated outside the infrastructure of the World Health Organization, and this has dramatically changed the political, economic, governance and cultural landscape of global health.

Is the global health system fit for future purpose?
Given that both the development challenges and the economic situation are changing across the world, the global system needs to adapt. Is the system fit for purpose? Are the purposes of the different parts of the system clearly defined? What is the role of the UN system within an international system that has changed and continues to change?
What we are doing

This project will analyse whether the functions of the global health system match the needs. It will consider the current state of the global health architecture and identify the current and future gaps in functions. The next step will involve examining whether the flows and sources of financing are appropriate, determining priority areas for change and developing any necessary plan of action.

The work fundamentally addresses the post-2015 agenda and is expected to provide clearly defined functions for the system in the new era.

How we are doing it

Innovative research on the global health system

• Mapping the system. Using network analysis, mapping of the system will determine the pluralism of global health initiatives and the vast network of actors operating in the system. This will serve as a starting point for considering how the functions are delivered and how future needs might best be met.

• Drawing lessons from global ‘environmental’ governance. This will explore what health can learn from other development areas such as the environment and climate change, and highlight areas where new institutional approaches to global health can be a trailblazer for other sectors.

Direct dialogue and engagement with key stakeholders.

• Interviews with representatives from global health agencies. Engaging with the WHO, UNAIDS, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and other key health organizations will contribute to an holistic understanding of the key functions and gaps among the major global health players.

• Thematic roundtables with experts. Roundtables will be convened on subjects ranging from leadership in global health to direct country assistance in order to foster dialogue among the experts in the field. Expert opinions will also inform a subsequent phase of work that would focus on developing specific options for improving the system.

Next steps

Findings from the first-phase exploration of the state of the global health architecture will help in identifying priority areas for change and developing any necessary plan of action. A more political, high-level phase of the project could follow on to address the third key question, focusing on concrete options for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the global health system.

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