

Germany's Presidency in the G20 (III)

Global Health as a Prerequisite for Security and Stability

Working Group of Young Foreign Policy Experts

Key Points

- Health, political stability and economic prosperity are inextricably linked. This connection recently came into focus once again with the Ebola crisis in Western Africa.
- In a time of globalization, the conditions have seldom been more favorable for the appearance and rapid spread of disease. At the same time, the Ebola crisis in Western Africa demonstrated that the international community is not adequately prepared for health crises. A reform of the crisis management system is urgently needed.
- The G20 is an appropriate forum for developing measures to respond to public health crises. The G20 states have the necessary capabilities to strengthen global health infrastructure, while at the same time their interconnectedness places them at risk and their status as leading regional powers places them in a position to advocate for this issue within their respective regions.

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Health must be
thought globally

Health crises have the
ability to destabilize
countries

Globalizations creates
conditions that favor
the appearance and
rapid spread of dis-
eases

Background

In December 2016, Germany will take over the presidency of the "Group of 20" (G-20) from China. Since the financial and economic crisis of 2008, this forum has brought together the world's leading industrialized and emerging countries at the head of state and head of government level. The presidency gives Germany the opportunity to shape the international agenda for overcoming a wide variety of global challenges. The German government has already announced that its presidency will have three themes: "stability, sustainability and resilience."

In this and two other papers, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Working Group of Young Foreign Policy Experts makes proposals as to the points which the German government should focus on, as well as ideas for resolving global problems which should be pursued within the G20. In this way, the young foreign policy experts will be helping to shape Germany's international responsibility in a concrete way.

This third paper concerns the importance of global health for security and stability. The two other papers deal with sustainable development policy and measures to stimulate global economic growth.

Introduction: Health, Security and Stability

*"The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security"*¹

Severe public health risks have the potential to threaten the stability of states and entire regions. Although the relationship between health and security was laid out as far back as the Preamble to the WHO Constitution in 1948, this link has long been absent from the political debate or denounced as incorrect. The increase of severe public health crises since the 1980's such as the rapid spread and devastating consequences of HIV/AIDS, SARS, the Anthrax attacks in the United States in 2001, as well as the appearance of the bird flu and mad cow disease, have raised the profile of public health topics in the international agenda.

The link between public health, political stability and economic prosperity is also becoming increasingly important in the political debate. This relationship was recently made clear particularly by the Ebola crisis in Western Africa, in the course of which e.g. Liberia was driven to the brink of political collapse.

One of the key interests of the international community is counteracting political instability. Extreme situations which arise due to public health risks have a direct and indirect impact on state resources, resulting in overburdened health care systems, significant job losses, widespread closures of schools and public institutions, declining economic productivity and, ultimately, situations in which civic life comes to a standstill and entire supply chains are severed. These events could trigger extreme tensions, leading to destabilization, unrest and the collapse of a state or an entire region. The danger applies for naturally occurring viruses as well as intentional attacks with pathogens (bioterrorism).

In a time of globalization, conditions are favorable for the appearance and rapid spread of disease: the spread of dangerous pathogens across national borders is facilitated by the significant increase in international travel and trade. Moreover, global population growth (especially in countries with weak states), progressive

urbanization and environmental destruction create ideal circumstances for the emergence of epidemics and pandemics.

In order to facilitate efforts to combat future public health risks and prevent political instability, Germany should propose the following four initiatives during its upcoming presidency of the G20 in 2017.

I. Strengthening Crisis Management: Establish a Liason Office for Public Health Risks

Goal

The international community must be placed in a position to manage complex public health risks quickly and effectively. To this end, a reliable situation assessment must be performed so as to sound the alarm early on in the event of a crisis. In addition, appropriate measures must be taken in the event of a crisis in order to organize adequate aid for the affected countries in the form of financial resources, personnel and materials, and to reliably coordinate the many different actors.

Problem

During the Ebola crisis in Western Africa, the response from the international community was late and inadequate. Criticism has focused on the WHO which, as an international health organization, is viewed as the organization primarily responsible for handling such crises. While it was known as early as March 2014 that the emerging cases involved the Ebola virus in its deadliest form, it was not until 8 August 2014 that the WHO declared the situation to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The creation of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), the first health mission in the history of the United Nations to be formed outside the purview of the WHO, also demonstrates the lack of confidence in the WHO's ability to manage the crisis.

Solution

Germany should seek a joint letter of intent from the G20 calling for the creation of an autonomous and adequately funded crisis rapid response mechanism within the WHO. The G20 states should seek to influence the ongoing reforms in this area so as to create a crisis liaison office below the office of Director General in the WHO hierarchy with a protected budget which will be exclusively responsible for health crises. Its task would be to make transparent recommendations to the Director General when an international public health emergency is declared. It would also be responsible for coordinating the crisis response, acting autonomously, and would be equipped with extensive and rapidly available funding. There would be a clear division of responsibilities within the coordination office, and procedures would be routinely followed, evaluated and revised when necessary. The members of the liaison office would have extensive experience and technical expertise with regard to handling public health crises and would come primarily from the fields of logistics, epidemiology, medicine and management.

Resources, personnel and materials must be provided quickly

Critique of the WHO

Creating a WHO crisis rapid response mechanism

Establishing a protected budget responsible for health crises

II. Strengthening Capabilities and Capacities in the Effort to Combat Public Health Risks

Goal

In the event of a public health crisis, the international community must be in a position to quickly provide adequate materials and personnel for the crisis zone. Medical first responders, as well as the logistical capacity and materials necessary to combat the crisis, must be kept at the ready so that they can be rapidly dispatched in the event of a crisis.

Problem

With its resolution of 19 September 2014 and the UNMEER mission, the UN Security Council created the first UN special mission to combat a public health crisis. The international community mobilized an unprecedented quantity of civilian and even military resources for this effort, and foreign medical teams played a key role combating the Ebola crisis on the ground.

However, many states face considerable challenges in this regard, particularly when it comes to providing adequately trained and experienced personnel. Even the institutions of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), including some German institutions, were not in a position to meet the considerable need for epidemiologists and other specialists. Moreover, logistical planning is inadequate in many places: for example, the inadequate capacity to execute medical evacuations made it difficult to recruit volunteers.

Solution

In its G20 presidency, Germany should advocate for strengthening capabilities to combat public health crises. Of particular importance in this regard is the ability to deploy national capacities worldwide.

Germany should therefore seek to secure a voluntary commitment from the G20 to maintain a pool of well-trained, available and rapidly deployable personnel, as well as the resources necessary to deploy them. The G20 states should also undertake to integrate their national institutions in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network and to build up capacities of this kind in their national institutions. Last but not least, the states should agree to undertake routine joint exercises with civilian and military personnel to combat public health crises, with access to military logistics.

III. Improving Early Detection

III.1. Creating a Reporting Office for NGOs

Goal

The G20 member states should seek to create a reporting office for NGOs within the WHO. The goal of this initiative is to improve and expedite the flow of information from NGOs to the WHO. This could also have the effect of extending the framework of cooperation between the WHO and NGOs and recognizing the key role played by non-state actors in a comprehensive reform of the global public health system.

First UN mission to combat a public health crisis

Logistical planning is inadequate

Undertaking routine joint exercises with civilian and military personnel

Improving the flow of information from NGOs to the WHO

Problem

NGOs often have special access to information, especially in countries where the WHO itself has an inadequate presence. In the Ebola crisis, for example, “Doctors without Borders” warned the international community about the scale of the Ebola epidemic outbreak as early as March 2014. Nevertheless, the WHO did not declare the international public health emergency until August 2014. In that case, the WHO relied on the willingness of the affected states to report cases of the disease, and chose to ignore the NGO’s warning. Delays in the reporting process can have drastic consequences.

Solution

Recognized national and international NGOs operating in the public health field could make available their expertise and their local know-how to the WHO. This new source of information will improve the WHO’s ability to mount a response, which depends on early detection of public health emergencies. NGOs could fill critical gaps in the available information, especially in cases where a country intentionally delays reporting illnesses. The reporting office should be embedded within the WHO’s reformed crisis response mechanism.

Making expertise and local know-how available to the WHO

III.2. Creating Incentives to Report Public Health Emergencies to the WHO

Goal

The G20 should create a system of incentives for countries reporting public health emergencies to the WHO. This recommendation aims to encourage states to report outbreaks of disease to the WHO in a timely manner so that the latter can set in motion an adequate response. At the same time, the global health care system could be structured in a more transparent manner.

System of incentives for countries reporting public health emergencies

Problem

The International Health Regulations (IHR) require states to report potential national public health emergencies to the WHO within 24 hours. Additionally, states may not impose travel or trade restrictions without scientific grounds. Unfortunately, some countries withhold this vital information out of concern for the political and economic consequences. This was the case, for example, in 2014, when Guinea initially downplayed the Ebola outbreak. Recent epidemics have demonstrated that early and accurate reporting of case numbers makes it easier to assess the situation, and has the potential to considerably reduce the number of fatalities and mitigate the long-term political and economic consequences.

Solution

States which report accurate case numbers to the WHO in a full and timely manner could be rewarded with rapid financial assistance to combat the epidemic and mitigate economic damage. At the same time, the G20 and WHO should use their political capital to admonish countries which are late in reporting an outbreak. This could take the form of publicly released opinions. It is also necessary to prevent situations in which states impose restrictions on travel and trade without reason, since such measures tend to isolate the affected countries even further. The mixture of political and economic incentives should be formulated so as to ensure that states become reliable partners of the WHO and make an important contribution towards early detection.

Financial assistance to combat epidemics

IV. Funding the Crisis Response: Complying with Financial Commitments

Goal

Rapid resource provision

The international community and its institutions should be placed in a position to quickly access adequate financial resources when the next public health crisis breaks out: in case of an acute epidemic, every day counts. A well-funded crisis mechanism would benefit all states.

Problem

Current financial mechanisms are inadequate

In the event of a public health crisis, valuable time must not be wasted collecting the necessary funding, as was the case during the Ebola epidemic. A major reason for the WHO's delayed response was the fact that contributors failed to follow through on their financial commitments and promises. Margaret Harris, a spokesperson for the World Health Organization, pointed this out as early as 2014: "We really don't have very much in the bank."² The "Report of the Ebola Interim Assessment Panel" and the response from the WHO Secretariat both conclude that the current funding mechanisms are inadequate: "Funding for emergency response and for technical support ... is lacking."³

Solution

Germany should advocate for a voluntary commitment calling upon all G20 members to immediately comply with their commitments to the World Bank's "Pandemic Emergency Facility" (PEF) and the World Health Organization's "Contingency Fund for Emergencies" (CFE). As the countries with the strongest economies, G20 members must set an example for the rest of the world.

V. The G20's Role and Germany's Responsibility for Global Health

G20 states have a responsibility to protect the global system

The G20 states play a key role in questions of global health. First, they have a particular responsibility to protect the global system as the system's largest beneficiaries. Second, their strong economic position means that they have the necessary capabilities to strengthen international public health infrastructure. Moreover, many of them are also leading regional powers, and are therefore in a position to carry the debate on global health questions beyond their own borders so as to include their entire region.

G20 states are particularly vulnerable

At the same time, more effective measures to combat international public health crises are in the interest of the G20 states themselves: after all, they are particularly vulnerable to these crises given their exposed position in the global system and their close integration into global systems. In fact, several G20 states have had to contend with severe public health crises in the past and are considered to be hotspots for the emergence and spread of new diseases. Therefore, the Group of 20 has a particular interest in taking up this issue and addressing it with particular urgency.

G20 states are particularly vulnerable

Germany promoted securing global health during its G7 presidency and it should use this momentum in order to introduce the issue into the G20 as well. Given its skills and expertise in public health, Germany is in a position to take on a leading role in strengthening global public health infrastructure. Improving global health is more than just a noble cause: it is a necessary prerequisite for international security, stability and development.

- 1| *Constitution of the WHO*, http://apps.who.int/gb/DGPN/pdf_files/constitution-en.pdf
- 2| *Otti Albert/Emoke Bebiak, Ebola-Hilfe kommt nur schleppend in Westafrika an*, *Welt Online*, 27.09.2016, <http://www.welt.de/gesundheit/article132684815/Ebola-Hilfe-kommt-nur-schleppend-in-Westafrika-an.html>.
- 3| *WHO, Report of the Ebola Interim Assessment Panel*, p. 6.

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<http://www.kas.de/wf/en/71.6391/>

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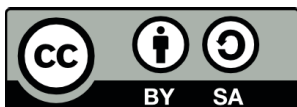
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