
India & World Health

Module 1 • i2P • Expedition India



Source: [Deepak Gupta](#)

"It is not only a country and something geographical, but the home and the youth of the soul, the everywhere and nowhere, the oneness of all times."

– Herman Hesse



TOPIC

During Expedition India i2P will look at the issue of World Health. Health is a resource which permits people to lead an individually, socially and economically productive life - many millions of the world's people lack this basic resource. This module introduces the country of India as our setting and then outlines some of the issues and obstacles to achieving World Health.

HISTORY OF INDIA

India is the perfect setting in which to explore the issues and challenges of World Health. More of a multitude of multitudes than a definable nation, present day India is a vast country stretching from the glaciers of the Himalayas

to tropical jungle, parched desert to lush flood plains. India has the 4th highest number of billionaires per country and yet by some estimates more than 600 million people within its borders live below the poverty line – by any measure, India has more poor than all of Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of its states such as Kerala have social and health indicators that rival any

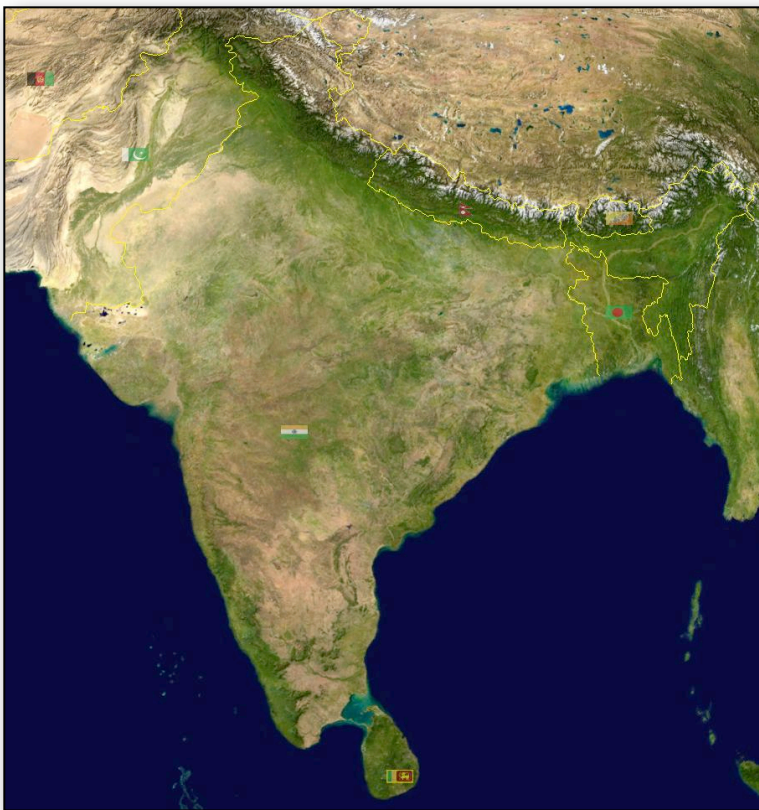


Figure 1: Satellite Image of India. The Thar Desert is in the North West of the image (source: [wikimedia](https://www.wikipedia.org/))

developed country – other states have managed to improve little in these areas and struggle with basic health service.

India is one of the cradles of modern civilization, and the birth place of two of the world's great religions - Hinduism and Buddhism – and has made many contributions to culture, philosophy, and art. It has contributed significantly to the evolution of early scientific thought including famously the creation of the mathematical concept of zero. Historically, India was a loose collection of princely states; these have been ruled or cooped by external forces for the better part of the last millennia – first by successive invasions from Central Asia and then the British; originally through the East India Company beginning in the early 1600's and then ultimately under a direct colonial rule from 1857.

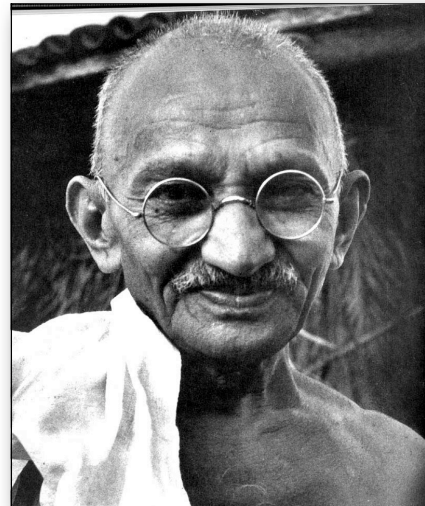


Figure 2: Bada Bagh, cenotaphs near Jaisalmer in Rajasthan, India (source: [michael hoefner](#))

MODERN INDIA

Politically, India through Mahatma Gandhi is the birthplace of non-violent political protest and in achieving independence from Britain in 1947 set the template that other colonies and the American civil rights movement would successfully follow. Gandhi however viewed the events of 1947 as a failure – with subversion from the British, the independence movement fractured along religious lines. The ultimate agreement partitioned the Muslim dominated areas of the east and west from the new Republic of India and in so doing created an ungovernable Pakistan with its two halves separated by over a thousand kilometers of Indian territory – East Pakistan eventually broke from the West in 1971 to form Bangladesh. The 1947 partition of India resulted in a blood bath of sectarian violence and retribution. Millions of people found themselves, their homes, and their livelihoods on the wrong side of the new hastily drawn borders.

India today is the world's largest democracy and is racing to modernize itself, grow economically, and shed its poverty and inequities. However rapid growth and development comes with its own set of problems and often worsens inequity and social friction before improving them. Today India is home to great wealth and great poverty. It has some of the world's most advanced hospitals and yet many of its citizens have little access to health care. India is a microcosm for the challenges the world faces in delivering health to its citizens.



Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), political and spiritual leader of India (source: [wikimedia](http://www.wikimedia.org)).

WORLD HEALTH

The path to achieving *World Health* has been plagued by misadventure and false starts. Despite best intentions, efforts often lacked clear co-ordinated goals and measurable outcomes. To address these failings, the United Nations declared in the year 2000 eight clear Millennium Development Goals (see: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>) with concrete and standardized measures of progress. Though all of these relate to health and well-being – for example MDG 1 : Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty – three of the eight do so directly:

4. Reduce Child Mortality
5. Improve Maternal Health

Did You Know?

Malaria is a microscopic parasite that is transmitted by mosquitos and invades and destroys red blood cells leading to anemia. Cerebral malaria causes inflammation in the brain and can lead to seizures and death. Some malaria is chronic and relapses periodically with a return of fever and other symptoms. Malaria accounts for one in five of all childhood deaths in Africa. Over 40% of the world's children live in malaria-endemic countries. Each year, approximately 300-500 million malaria infections lead to over one million deaths, of which over 75% occur in African children < 5 years. What are the consequences? What is the relationship with the 3 health Millennium Development Goals?

- Malaria in pregnancy leads to low birth weight and premature delivery, both of which are associated with an increased risk of neonatal death and impaired cognitive development.
- Malaria in childhood can lead to permanent neurological problems including blindness and recurrent fever and anemia lead to lack of energy and fatigue.
- This in turn affects the ability to perform in school and decreases opportunities for future learning and the attainment of independence.

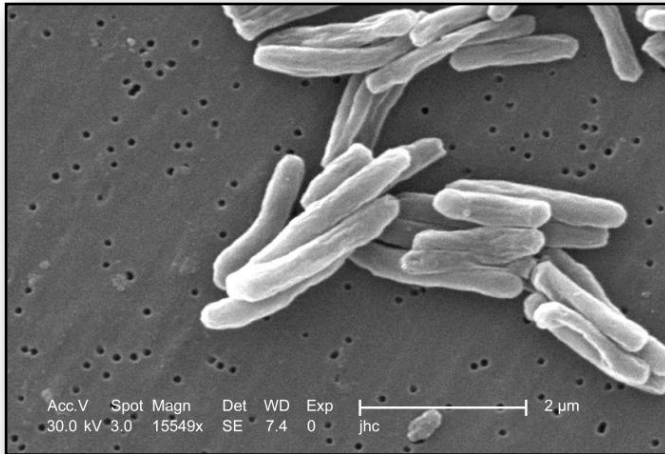


Figure 4: Under a high magnification, a number of Gram-positive M. tuberculosis bacteria, which attack the body and destroy tissue (source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov))

6. Combat HIV/Aids, Malaria, and other diseases

Having clear goals has also mobilized donors and created new and innovative funding mechanisms and partnerships. The Global Fund (see: <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/>) was created with seed money from Bill Gates and Warren Buffet and is funded primarily by Western governments. It has become the largest funder of HIV/Aids,

Malaria, and Tuberculosis treatment in many impoverished nations and claims that its activities have saved 6.5 million lives to date.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Health is a resource and those who lack it are severely disadvantaged when it comes to facing the challenges of our competitive and sometimes hostile world. The health Millennium Development Goals aim to ensure that every individual has a foundation of wellness. Maternal health affects directly infant health and survival. Significant illness in childhood can leave a lifelong legacy of poor health. The chronic diseases of HIV/Aids, Malaria, Tuberculosis, and various parasitic infections rob individuals of cognitive function to focus at school, energy to expend at work, and render them susceptible to

Take Home Points

1. The United Nation has set out World Millennium Goals in order to ensure that every individual has the right to dignity, freedom, equality, a basic standard of living that includes freedom from hunger and violence, and encourages tolerance and solidarity.
2. Three of the eight World Millennium Goals apply directly to World Health:
 - The reduction of child mortality
 - The improvement of maternal health
 - Combating HIV/Aids, Malaria, and other diseases
3. India is a country of great extremes that can illustrate many of the issues facing World Health today.

other illnesses. In brief, healthy moms lead to healthy babies, healthy babies to healthy children, and, in the absence of chronic diseases such as Malaria, healthy children lead to healthy adults able to face the challenges of day to day life.

Significant progress has been made towards the Millennium Development Goal targets in some countries. However, many nations, including India, are not on track to meet their health MDGs by 2015.

With the Millennium Development Goals in mind we will look specifically at the following six World Health themes over the course of the expedition:

- Health & Population
- Health Exercise & Nutrition
- Health, Wealth & Poverty
- Health & Government
- Health & Environment
- The Future of World Health

Figure 5: Young Muslim woman in the [Thar Desert](#) near [Jaisalmer](#), India (source: [Paul Rudd](#))

