

Fact or Fiction?



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The 10/90 Gap

“While wealthy nations pursue drugs to treat baldness and obesity, depression in dogs, and erectile dysfunction, elsewhere millions are sick or dying from preventable or treatable infectious and parasitic diseases,” reports Ricki Lewis.¹ Yet every year about 11 million children die before their fifth birthday—most of them in low and middle income countries. Of these, about eight million children die from no more than five conditions: pneumonia, diarrheal diseases, malaria, malnutrition, and measles. Others suffer infections that are preventable with currently available vaccines or medicines.² Some 1.1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water and about 2.4 billion live without adequate sanitation. As a result, about 250 million people suffer from water and sanitation related diseases each year, and more than three million die annually, most of them women and children.³

What is the 10/90 Gap?

Worldwide more than U.S. \$70 billion is spent on health research and development. Yet, only about 10 percent of this is used for research into 90 percent of the world's health problems. This is called the 10/90 gap.⁴ What's being done to work these issues? The Global Forum for Health Research was established in 1998 to help correct the 10/90 gap in health research, because the human and economic costs of such misallocation of resources are enormous, particularly for the poor. Susan Jupp notes: “The Global Forum's central objective is to help correct the 10/90 gap by focusing research efforts on diseases representing the heaviest burden on the world's health and facilitating collaboration between partners in both the public and private sectors. A reallocation of one percent of research spending would provide U.S. \$700 million for priority research.”⁴

Development Category	Health Spending Per Capita
Least developed countries	\$11
Lower middle-income countries	\$93
Upper middle-income countries	\$241
High-income countries	\$1,907

**The 10/90 Report on Health Research 2001-2002, Susan Jupp, Editor, (Geneva, Switzerland, World Health Organization, 2002), 5*

There's a strong link between people's health and the development of their country. The accompanying table shows the noticeable discrepancy between undeveloped and developed countries on health spending. It shows the health spending per capita by level of development.*

The Global Forum believes that solutions to current health challenges will depend on the strength of the partnerships created between members of the following constituencies, which are all represented in the Global Forum⁵:

- Governments (policy makers)
- Multilateral organizations
- bilateral aid donors
- International foundations
- National and international civil society organizations and community organizations
- Women's organizations
- Research oriented institutions and universities
- Private sector companies
- The media

Note that environmental activists groups are not listed in the above. As I've observed previously, it's ironic that environmental organizations constantly throw themselves at the cause of pollution, rail

about some part per zillion pollutant in dirt that a child might eat, and seem more worried about trees, animals, and pretty places in the Third World than they are about millions of children and adults dying each year because of simple pollution problems that are eminently solvable.⁶ Here are some examples:

1. At the 1992 United Conference on Economic Development held in Rio di Janeiro, environmentalists from the northern hemisphere staged demonstrations every day. One *Journal do Brazil* headline said: “Americans and Europeans March in Defense of Animals, Forests, and Ecology.” However, the subhead told the real story: “Brazilians protest hunger, poverty, and oppression.”⁷
2. In the 10 years that Kyoto has been the focus of billions of spending, 15 million children have died before their fifth birthday because of contaminated water.⁸

What About Pharmaceutical Firms?

Drug companies are not only doing little research on pharmaceutical needs of Third World countries, they are often no longer producing those few helpful drugs

that were available for tropical diseases.⁹ Susan Jupp reports, "Of the 1233 drugs that reached the global market between 1975 and 1997, only 13 were for tropical infectious diseases that primarily affect the poor in low and middle income countries."¹⁰ Ricki Lewis adds "In the spring of 2001, the Harvard School of Public Health surveyed 20 large pharmaceutical firms in the U.S., Europe and Japan. Of 11 respondents, eight had done no research over the past year in tuberculosis, malaria, African sleeping sickness, leishmaniasis, or Chagas disease; seven spent less than one percent of their research and development budget on any of these disorders. In contrast, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America's New Medicines in Development survey found that, of 137 drugs in the pipeline to treat infectious or parasitic disease, one targeted sleeping sickness and one malaria. Yet eight drugs are in clinical trials for erectile dysfunction, seven for obesity, and four for sleeping disorders. The most neglected diseases affect predominantly people in the southern hemisphere who do not contribute to the pharmaceutical market."¹¹

In fairness to drug companies, developing new drugs is a very expensive process.

In the fall of 2001, a group of researchers from Tufts concluded that the average cost of developing a new drug had more than doubled since 1987—to \$802 million. Others think this figure is high, but even at \$100 million less, it is still a large amount.¹¹ Further, the probability of a single drug candidate progressing from discovery through registration is less than 0.5 percent.¹² Add to this the fact that the cost of the drug could likely be out of reach for many folks. Someone who has an income of \$.25 a day would find a medication costing \$5 to be prohibitive.

Barriers

Prabhat Jha and his colleagues note that additional funding will help in many cases. However, they point out that providing money for places where you have corruption, poor rule of law and armed conflict most likely will not work. Their good news is that more than two billion people live in places with better governance where additional funding would help. The bad news is that about 260 million people currently live in highly constrained countries.¹³ Think about this for a moment. This number is not far from the population of the U.S. (~290,000 million). Be thankful you live in a developed country.

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