O’Neill Institute Health Briefing No 3:
JALI—Exploring a Framework Convention on Global Health

The Joint Action and Learning Initiative on National and Global Responsibilities for Health: Progress, Publication, and Potential

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The past several months have seen significant, though still quite preliminary, progress towards a global health agreement that could be captured in a Framework Convention on Global Health (FCGH)—the founding vision of the O’Neill Institute (http://ssrn.com/abstract=1014082). The mandate of the Joint Action and Learning Initiative on National and Global Responsibilities for Health (JALI) is to explore an FCGH. JALI is a global network of civil society and academics working towards a post-MDG global health agreement aimed at resolving today’s vast health inequities between and within countries, establishing far greater accountability, and meeting major challenges in global governance for health, such as poor coordination and inadequate financing. JALI’s work is firmly based on the international human right to health. This briefing from the O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at the Georgetown University informs readers of recent progress and a new publication, and looks ahead.

FCGH gaining momentum


At both consultations, stakeholders formally endorsed the imperative of exploring an FCGH. An FCGH can only succeed in conjunction with a social movement for the right to health and with the broad support of civil society, especially in the South. Thus, the affirmation that the FCGH resonates with some critical organizations and individuals represents an important step forward for JALI – even as the Johannesburg and New Delhi consultations are only early efforts to discuss and debate the idea of an FCGH. The process of reaching out to a broad spectrum of civil society and communities has only just begun, and will be a priority for JALI in the months ahead.

This interest in a Framework Convention extends from civil society and academia to the pinnacle of international institutions. In March, the UN Secretary-General endorsed a Framework Convention on Global Health, writing: “Let the AIDS response be a beacon of global solidarity

Recent JALI publication

JALI is committed to a broad, inclusive process in exploring an FCGH, a process that we will catalyze and help guide, but that is not ours to control. Informed and widespread discussion about the potential for an FCGH is therefore critical. To help encourage that discussion, several JALI partners recently published a major article (attached) in the open-access journal PLOS Medicine, which offers preliminary directions on answering key questions in global health and the potential for a new framework for mutual responsibilities (http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1001031). Earlier publications providing more background on JALI and the FCGH include an editorial in the WHO Bulletin (http://ssrn.com/abstract=1703486) and a background paper for the World Health Report 2010 (http://ssrn.com/abstract=1714604).

The PLoS Medicine article presents our evolving understanding of core issues that JALI must address, in particular the health services to which everyone is entitled under the right to health, the national and global responsibilities for securing this right, and global governance structures that can realize these responsibilities and close major health inequities. The article also explains how the right to health provides critical insights into how countries implement universal health coverage, and on the mutual benefits to countries in the Global South and North that would come from a global health agreement defining national and global health responsibilities.

Looking ahead

JALI continues to move ahead in our exploration of the content, nature, and scope of an FCGH. We are researching answers to central questions we have been receiving, such as what are the basic goals and building blocks of an FCGH, and what are its advantages. And we are in the process of preparing research questions on which we will seek collaboration from partners all over the world – including from you.

We look forward to engaging with you on JALI. Only through a broad and inclusive partnership can we realize the vision of a global health agreement grounded in the right to health. And such an agreement will only succeed with an empowered right to health social movement, a movement that has been gathering momentum particularly over the past decade, and which we hope to support in whatever ways we can.

For further information, or to become involved with JALI and the movement for a Framework Convention on Global Health, please contact: Varsha Lalla (lalla@section27.org.za) (SECTION27, South Africa) or Eric Friedman (eaf74@law.georgetown.edu) (O’Neill Institute, USA).
About the O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law

The O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law <http://www.oneillinstitute.org> at Georgetown University was established to respond to the need for innovative solutions to the most pressing national and international health concerns. Housed at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington D.C., the O’Neill Institute reflects the importance of public and private law in health policy analysis. The essential vision for the O’Neill Institute rests upon the proposition that the law has been, and will remain, a fundamental tool for solving critical health problems in our global, national, and local communities. By contributing to a more powerful and deeper understanding of the multiple ways in which law can be used to improve health, the O’Neill Institute hopes to encourage key decision-makers in the public, private, and civil society sectors to employ the law as a positive tool to enable individuals and populations in the United States and throughout the world to lead healthier lives.