

Healthy Living

Healthy living and well-being are at the centre of most people's lives. Without our health, people's quality of life suffers. Health covers a large range of issues including bodily health, mental health, physical health, epidemics, disease, and much more. Here in South Africa, I have identified four points from the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals that I notice affect people's lives and well-being. Furthermore, I have identified one extra point that I believe needs addressing in impoverished areas within the country. And finally, there are several links from health and well-being to other issues, namely gender and education.

When reading through the Sustainable Development Goals there were four points that stood out to me based on my experience in South Africa. The first one is the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa. This expands to tuberculosis as well as TB often is the fatal punch delivered to a weakened HIV/AIDS immune system. HIV/AIDS is not spoken about regularly here and due to the taboo nature, it isn't being addressed and dealt with as efficiently as it could be. It is a very complex issue, one that I do not anywhere near understand as a visitor to South Africa. The stigma around HIV/AIDS and the cultural challenges are by far the largest hurdle that I have seen to conquer the HIV virus. There are campaigns happening that are attempting to squash the rumours and stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

Like anywhere in the world, drugs and alcohol are prevalent here in South Africa. Alcohol consumption is commonplace in the township and this is evident with men drinking outside their homes, broken beer bottles littered throughout the streets, and cheap, easy access to alcohol. I have heard horrible stories of assault, rape, and domestic violence and drugs and alcohol never help dangerous situations such as these. Education, prevention, and awareness would all assist alcohol consumption patterns and issues stemming from alcohol use and abuse.

Road traffic accidents are all too common in South Africa. Thousands of people die in vehicle accidents every year in this country. A few weekends ago on the Easter long weekend, we were told that approximately four hundred people were killed on the road on that weekend alone. There is also a very strong link between drinking and driving and fatalities in South Africa. I have personally seen several, what I would guess to be drunk drivers on the road swerving in and out of their lane. Tougher penalties are needed for those breaking the law. Additionally, a larger effort towards curbing distracted drivers is needed and better role modeling is also required as police officers are constantly texting and driving. And finally, I recommend a more comprehensive drivers training program for young and inexperienced drivers.

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Health care is very two-tiered in South Africa. There is universal access to health care but the standard is low compared to the privileged medical aide alternative. Those with money would not go to a government hospital. I had an infected toe a few weeks after arriving here and received care to the highest standard. I imagine that South Africa's medical system faces similar challenges to that of many countries where money can often buy a better and faster health care result. In terms of recommendations, first and foremost, I would suggest continuing to upgrade and enhancing the government system to provide quality care to the country's most vulnerable.

Before concluding, I would like to mention that I feel it is problematic that the health related SDGs do not touch on any healthy eating or healthy lifestyle aspects of health. South Africa, along with dozens of other countries in the world, is faced with obesity, people making poor food choices, and the rise of diabetes and cardiac related illnesses. I feel that this would be an appropriate sub point within the health section of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The links between the health related issues in South Africa are large. Alcohol, gender based violence, and traffic accidents are all closely related. Additionally, it is possible to connect health issues to the education and gender equality Sustainable Development Goals. Education and gender relate to health in the same areas that health issues are interconnected. When health, gender, and education are discussed together, positive outcomes would be possible to achieve.