

How Effective is WHO as a Global Organization?

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Abstract: Analysis of the effectiveness and international impact and influence of the World Health Organization, the leading global healthcare system, with a focus on key aspects. These are: structure and composition, including reforms and historical insight, the role of WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic, the essential aspect of funding and contribution from member states, as well as the future of WHO and its effectiveness in its aims and strategies. The World Health Organization has many criticisms and strengths, which are weighed up in accordance to each aspect and overall judged to achieve a conclusive outcome and measurement of the effectiveness of WHO as a global organization.

Keywords: WHO, international, healthcare, effectiveness, organization.

INTRODUCTION

Global health is a vital part of a well-functioning society, and we are truly fortunate to have an advanced international organization dedicated to improving public health and tackling disease. WHO (World Health Organization) promotes global health and protects the vulnerable in areas of medical care. However, simply having a global health initiative in place is not enough – it needs to be efficient and effective to provide the best care and successful leadership for healthcare.

What makes a global organization effective?

An effective organization includes having the motivation and aims to pursue medical care and support across the world, as well as the means, and being successful in implementing these aims and measures and managing disasters. They also have support and funding across the world, along with global influence and trust from the population. There are many factors which I go on to explore in my report, that impact the effectiveness of WHO such as evaluation of funding and key successes and weaknesses, as well as exploring the role of WHO in the future. These points are important when assessing the effectiveness of WHO as they have considerable influence over how it functions as an organization, and how effectively it carries out its mission and how it will continue to operate.

“Health is a human right. No one should get sick or die just because they are poor, or because they cannot access the services they need.” - Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO.

Section 1: Formation and composition

Constitution

- Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
- The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.
- The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent on the fullest co-operation of individuals and States.

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- The achievement of any State in the promotion and protection of health is of value to all.
- Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of diseases, especially communicable disease, is a common danger.
- Healthy development of the child is of basic importance; the ability to live harmoniously in a changing total environment is essential to such development.
- The extension to all peoples of the benefits of medical, psychological and related knowledge is essential to the fullest attainment of health.
- Informed opinion and active co-operation on the part of the public are of the utmost importance in the improvement of the health of the people.
- Governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures.

To evaluate the effectiveness of WHO as a global organization, it needs to be traced back to its roots and initial formation. WHO was formed after World War 1, as a UN global health body in 1948. Its constitution, being signed in July 1946, sets out the principles which are:

Its main objective in 1948 was the attainment by all peoples of the highest levels of health, and within its constitution lays out how it will carry out these aims and what it will do to aid them. The initial objectives are very broad, with general ideas about promoting public health, and acknowledgement of the importance of healthcare development across the world. WHO set out its aims that allowed for further development, which we can see in its future reforms, e.g., the Triple Billion Targets in 2019. However, it is clear from the constitution and formation of WHO that it has elements that cause it to be ineffective, also shown in the composition of its staff and overall structure of the agency.

Reform

The constitution was written to set out the foundations for a global health organization, with basic terms e.g., stating that healthcare should be available to all regardless of race, religion etc., that allow room for further development. This way it is effective as it allowed future generations to reform WHO and improve it to cater to changing climates. WHO is shown to bring about changes and amendments, including the triple billion targets announced in 2019. These targets are:



Universal health coverage

One billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage, tracked via 15 indicators.



Health emergencies

One billion more people better protected from health emergencies, tracked via six indicators.



Healthier populations

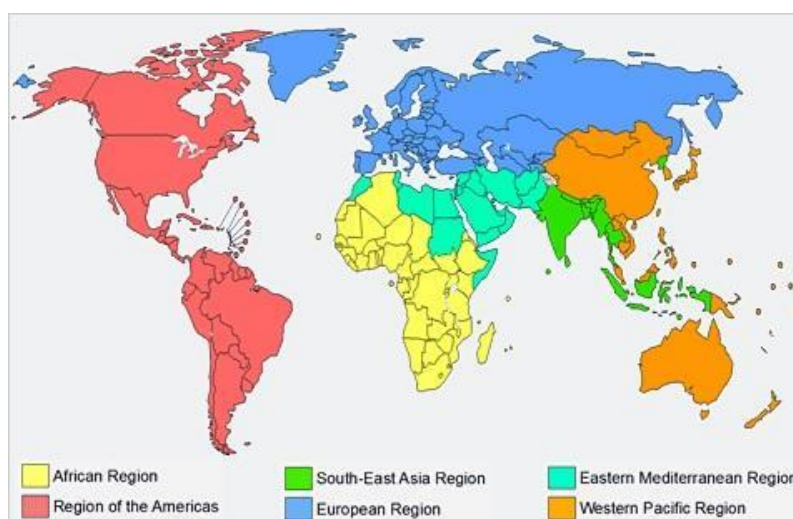
One billion more people enjoying better health and well-being, tracked via 14 SDG indicators. This way, the aims for reform and better management of WHO is shown and as this allows them to promote healthcare and medical aid and assistance to billions of more people by 2023, their ambition and global reach is further demonstrated. This also emphasizes the effectiveness of WHO as a global organization as it is successful in helping people and developing its initial aims and objectives to further completing its function as the international health initiative.

Composition

However, it is ineffective due to the leadership arrangements within it, for example the composition of WHO (out of the one third deemed professional) includes around half of the staff being medical specialists, and only 1.6% being social scientists and 1.4% being lawyers. Of course, having large proportions of medics within this organization is crucial, however the few members with other specialties hinder the effective functioning of WHO, as it means they lack the capacity to efficiently manage international relations and to understand traditions and cultures on a local level, all factors that impact healthcare in different areas of the world. Therefore, WHO is limited in its performance of some of its core principles. The balance of staff skills needs to be carefully considered to provide an effective global organization, and the lack of this therefore shows further ineffectiveness.

Structure

Furthermore, WHO is ineffective as a global organization due to its structure and consequent management strategies. Being the world's leading public health authority, it has significant responsibility in terms of global healthcare, and this means it needs the power and credibility required to carry out this role effectively. This comes from an efficient structural management and needs all those involved to take part in an organized and effective way for the biggest impact on global health. Although it is the only body that has convening power to rapidly bring together different specializing fields when needed (e.g., regulators, scientists, public health officials etc.), this is not effective on its own. The mix between the technical and political sides within its institutional structure is inefficient as it does not allow WHO to fulfill its true potential – instead, the organization is faced with conflicting abilities: being able to advise but not direct, evaluate but never judge, guide but never govern. WHO is therefore proven to be ineffective as this uncomfortable structure results in general mediocrity on both technical and political sides and restricts the organization in terms of its ability to effectively manage global health matters- which need skillful operation between political and technical elements? To worsen the situation, the overall agency of WHO is made up of expensive and cumbersome organizational structure with six regional offices around the world with headquarters in Geneva, and while the offices are only semi-autonomous, the resulting complex management structure adds to the ineffectiveness of WHO as a global organization.



This diagram shows the different regions that WHO operates under, six of them that report back to headquarters in Switzerland.

Overall

Overall, in terms of the formation and constitutional reform of WHO, it is effective as a global organization due to its substantial impact and influential reach, but limited in some respects e.g., its structure and composition, which, despite tracing back to its early formation, have elements still present today that make it ineffective.

Section 2: Significance of WHO

The effectiveness of WHO as a global organization can also be measured in regard to its evidenced responses to past events, and the varying levels of success may indicate how well they managed them. Key examples which I have explored include the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and the handling of this by WHO, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic which allowed me to evaluate its effectiveness in today's current climate, as this pandemic is ongoing. Furthermore, other successes have also been highlighted such as WHO's child vaccination programs which led to the eradication of many serious diseases.

Ebola outbreak

A frequently discussed event that WHO attempted to manage was the Ebola epidemic in 2014. Its largely ineffective response to it, and its overall mismanagement of the situation was due to different factors that led the organization to make bad decisions (Gostin, 2014) such as:

- Withdrawing too soon from Liberia and Guinea,
- hesitancy and general slowness in declaring severity of the outbreak (delay in declaration of PHEIC – public health emergency of international concern)
- Its failure to rapidly mobilize global medical assistance.
- Their poor responses to requests for technical and healthcare related guidance from local authorities.

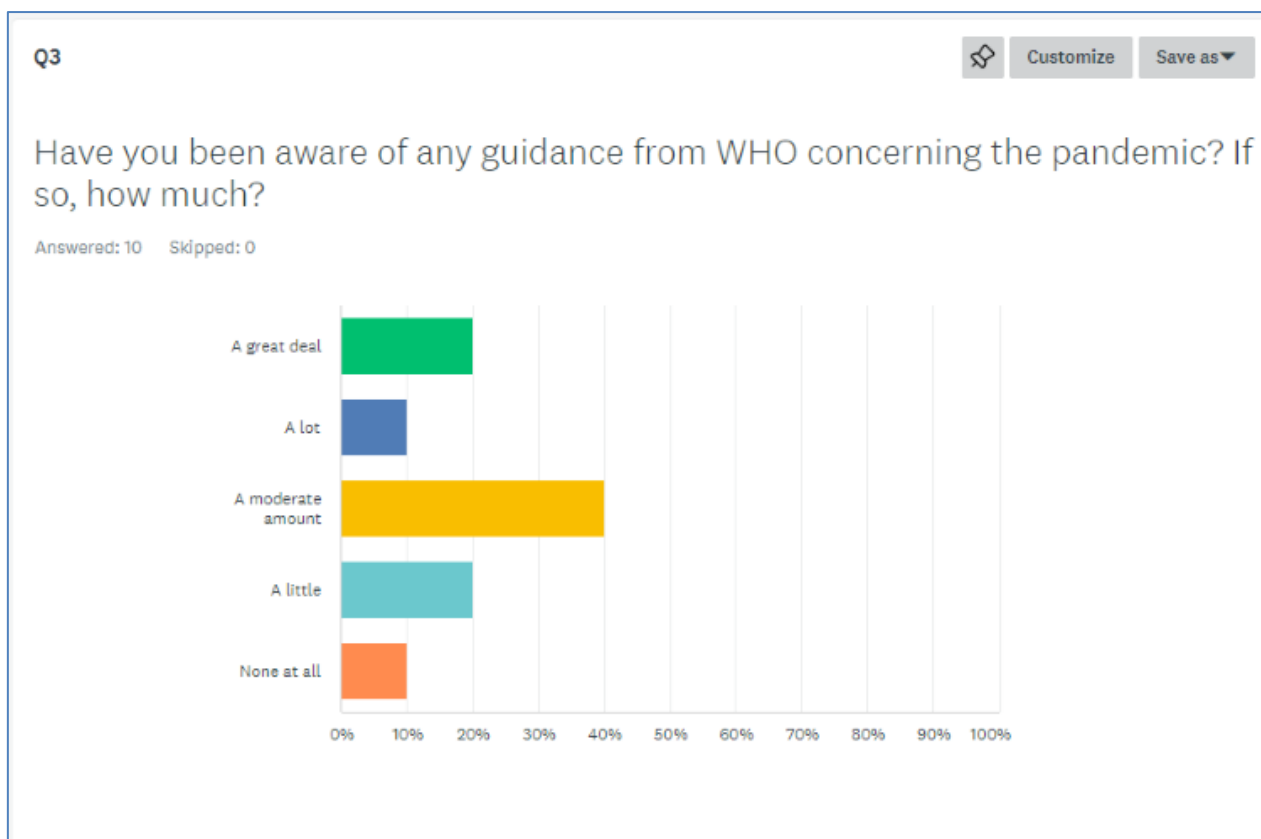
It was seen that, nearly a quarter of WHO's Member States instituted travel bans and other additional measures not called for by WHO, which significantly interfered with international travel, causing negative political, economic and social consequences for the affected countries. These shortcomings highlight the weaknesses of the organization and therefore show its ineffectiveness in response to global disasters, and this is further shown by the failures in leadership that allowed a preventable disease to grow so difficult to control, causing extreme harm and damage to social order.

Being the lead health emergency response agency, WHO plays an important role in how they deal with and tackle such prominent issues around the world, and therefore needs organizational and financial stability and support, with effective means of rapid decision making and developed human resource policies. It was also said in the Report of the Ebola Assessment Panel that "WHO does not have the capacity or organizational culture to deliver a full emergency public health response." (Kuznetsova 2020) Many aspects of WHO were undermined in its major failures during the Ebola epidemic, which therefore show how ineffective it is as a global organization.

COVID-19 Response

The effectiveness of WHO can also be measured by evaluating the response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. International cooperation is vital in controlling pandemics, because of their transboundary nature, and WHO therefore plays a crucial role as the only source of legally binding regulations for global pandemic response. They have been effective in providing standard guidelines and technical assistance to states and countries, which was extremely impactful and lifesaving in developing/ low-income countries. While it has been an effective body for healthcare in this way, there are many aspects that lead it to be ineffective, for example the criticism that it became a tool of Chinese politics and propaganda, and that WHO failed to act decisively in regards to China's handling of the outbreak for better preparation for the dangerous disease. (Fidler 2020) This raised questions about WHO's authority and power to challenge states during serious outbreaks for the benefits of international health security. Therefore this limits the effectiveness of WHO as a global organization as its credibility is undermined, and it failed to exercise global health leadership, which is shown through its response and management to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, despite early mismanagement of the pandemic, WHO has been effective as a global health organization in its transparency in sharing information and research to the public to ease concern and tension around the world, and its attempts to counter online misinformation and fake news have been significant, especially with the growing popularity of different social media platforms where fake news spreads easily. As well as the medical and public health expertise that WHO provides to all different countries to combat the disease, it also provides warnings, and guidelines about the pandemic's threat to low income and developing countries, which is extremely important in itself. It also shows the extended reach and consideration of care of WHO, making it an effective global organization.



Here are the responses to a question on my survey, which show most people thought they had been aware of WHO guidance on the pandemic to a moderate amount, and this suggests that current guidelines and regulations are somewhat being represented and advised on to the local public, whilst some people are completely unaware. This demonstrates a weakness of WHO and it's lacking influence, which reduces its effectiveness.

As part of WHO's response, the R&D Blueprint was activated to improve scientifically the coronavirus situation. The Blueprint aims to improve coordination between scientists and global health professionals, accelerate the research and development process, and develop new norms and standards to learn from and improve upon the global response. This shows initiative and intentions for improvement in the future which further effectiveness.

Vaccination programs

WHO's successes can also be seen in its past achievements such as the eradication of smallpox in 1979, as well as the establishment of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. Since its launch in 1988, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has reduced the number of cases of polio by more than 99%, and these major successes indicate the effectiveness of WHO as a global organization.

Overall

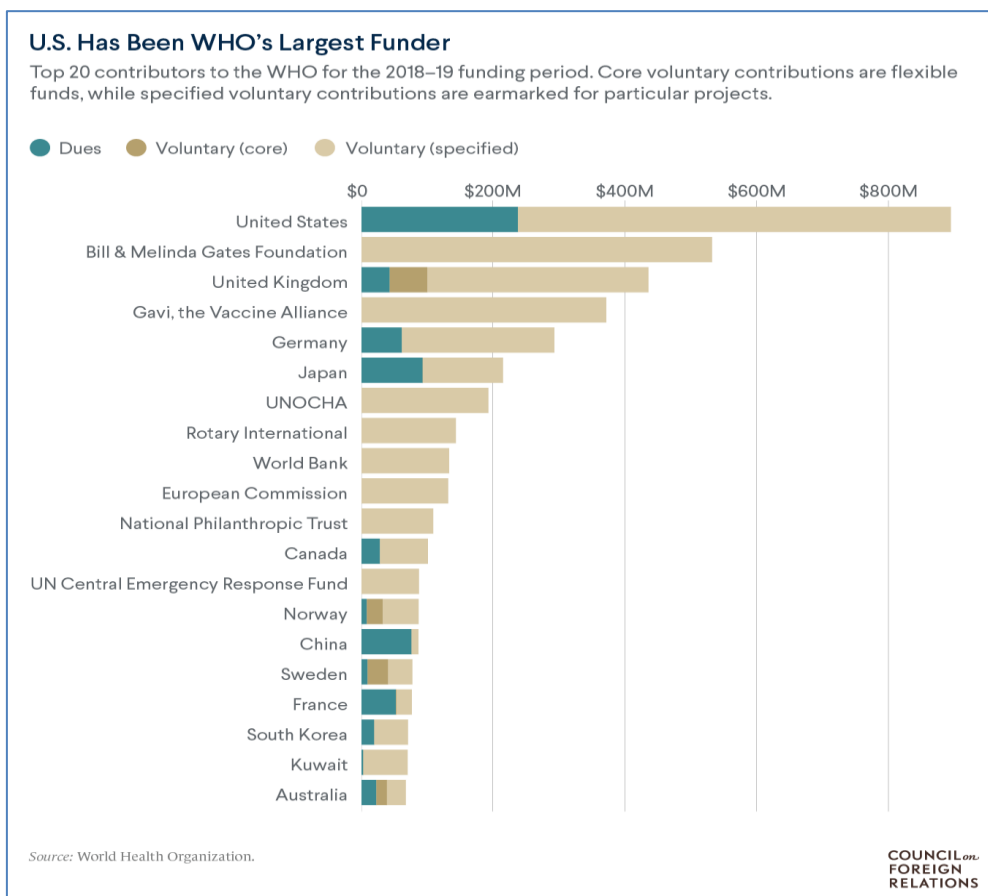
The authority and the capacity of the WHO to lead the international response have been questioned during the Ebola outbreak as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. The crises also revealed the lack of resources of the WHO to effectively prevent and respond to pandemics, however during such a difficult emergency the progress made by WHO has been commendable and through the handling of the large scale of the COVID-19 pandemic and measures put in place is can be argued that its overall impact has been positive and somewhat successful in the current climate. WHO has shown improvement in its management of crises and has proven to put more effort into improving their handling in the future, which overall makes it effective as an organization.

Section 3: Impact of funding

Moreover, the effectiveness of WHO as a global organization can be measured in regard to its funding and how successfully it influences the impact of the organization. The "triple billion" goals (described earlier in section 1) set by WHO are a joint effort, making known a need for collective action and accountability between member states, the WHO itself, and other non-state organizations and partners. In setting these goals, WHO encourages collaboration and effective teamwork for the most progress and successful results.

Funding and financial stability is closely linked with foreign policy because the organization has a global outreach and requires all member states to contribute in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. However, with changing international political climates this is not always the case, which can be seen in the recent events of the COVID-19 pandemic and the actions of member states and nations. Therefore, the effectiveness of WHO is reduced as it places substantial reliance on the funding and support of countries around the world, and so it is limited in the way that it is negatively impacted.

USA Funding



A key example of how WHO is impacted by funding and financial support can be seen across the course of the Coronavirus pandemic, and in particular the actions of the USA and its government.

This bar chart shows the top 20 contributors for funding for WHO (as of 2019), and it is clear that the USA is the leading funder, due to its great size and population, and therefore play a crucial role in the effective functioning of the organization. During 2018, President Trump reportedly threatened to cut US contributions to WHO, and this was further seen in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic (with higher stakes) when he announced that he would cut all US ties with WHO. This was due to claims that it had failed to reduce China's influence over the organization, which would have no impact on the healthcare services provided but was necessary in his view.

The USA freezing funding at such a crucial time had a significant impact on WHO, as it lost its biggest contributor and therefore a substantial amount of funding which was necessary to keep providing help and medical care and guidance during such a difficult time. The United States fell to the third largest donor in 2020, providing around \$594 million (which is about 8 percent of WHO's budget). The reprehensible actions of the US government had extremely negative implications on the management and handling of the pandemic situation, biggest of all the massive increase in global cases of the virus.

Although the funding suspension by the US was only for 60-90 days, due to the previous indications of cutting contributions, the potential for general US withdrawal from WHO funding under this announcement would have caused severe damage and would be seriously and significantly felt in areas that need the most support. It is referred to by

Richard Horton, the editor-in-chief of the Lancet medical journal, as “a crime against humanity.” He also wrote, “Every scientist, every health worker, every citizen must resist and rebel against this appalling betrayal of global solidarity.”

This therefore further shows the obstructive and neglecting actions of international governments and member states have increasingly large influences on global health and the overall abilities of organizations such as WHO. These events threaten the internationalism and effective global governance that WHO provides, and that is essential to combatting pandemics and improving public health, and therefore the level of reliance on international funding and support leads to a financial instability and volatile nature of organization that makes WHO ineffective as a global organization.

Global support

However, in terms of its overall effectiveness, global financial support must be considered, not solely the actions of one sole contributor. In response to the US freezing funding, other member states increased their contributions to WHO, partially from need and necessity but also from genuine concern and care for the global health initiative, after seeing the lack thereof in the US government. Furthermore, President Biden, upon his inauguration in 2021, issued the executive order to reengage with WHO and halt withdrawal of funding, which shows the support of WHO across the world, and isolates the neglect and disruption of care to the actions of a few. This shows that WHO has a large support base and can rely on its member states to come together in times of need and provide the help and assistance required to promote and protect the global population in healthcare. The influence of WHO on such a global scale is demonstrated in the level of support received from member states across the world, and this further shows that it is highly effective as global organization.

Moreover, this level of support can be emphasized by the voluntary donations from charities such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is the second leading contributor to WHO as of 2019, as shown in the bar chart above. While this further shows the desire of the public to support global healthcare and WHO as the organization, it can be seen as being ineffective due to its heavy reliance on this. In the past decade WHO has become increasingly dependent on voluntary contributions, which leads one to question the funding strategy and management system in place for member states, which were all required to contribute to aid the organization. It also puts pressure on WHO to align its goals and objectives with those of its donors, as most of this money comes with strings attached by funders to their own priorities, and this means WHO only controls 30% of its budget. The impact of voluntary contributions makes the organization ineffective as it means it is harder for WHO to have its autonomy in its own agenda. The dangerous levels of dependency on voluntary donations (now making up more than 80% of its overall budget) has considerable influence on its functioning and limits its effectiveness overall.

Section 4: What does the future look like for WHO?

The effectiveness of WHO as a global organization can finally be measured by exploring its aims and concerns for the future. Current international situations impact this, such as the increasing globalization throughout the world – which refers to the increasing economic, political and social interdependence and global integration that takes place across national boundaries. This has critical implications for public health and international healthcare governance, as it interconnects many risks and opportunities that affect the sustainability of healthcare systems worldwide. Because of this, WHO will play an increasingly important role in global health, as governments will turn to international cooperation to achieve control over disease and healthcare troubles that affect their populations? There is a growing need for new frameworks of international collaboration as a result of the widespread influence of globalization, and therefore WHO is effective as a global organization because of its ability to be useful and necessary in the future.

Climate change

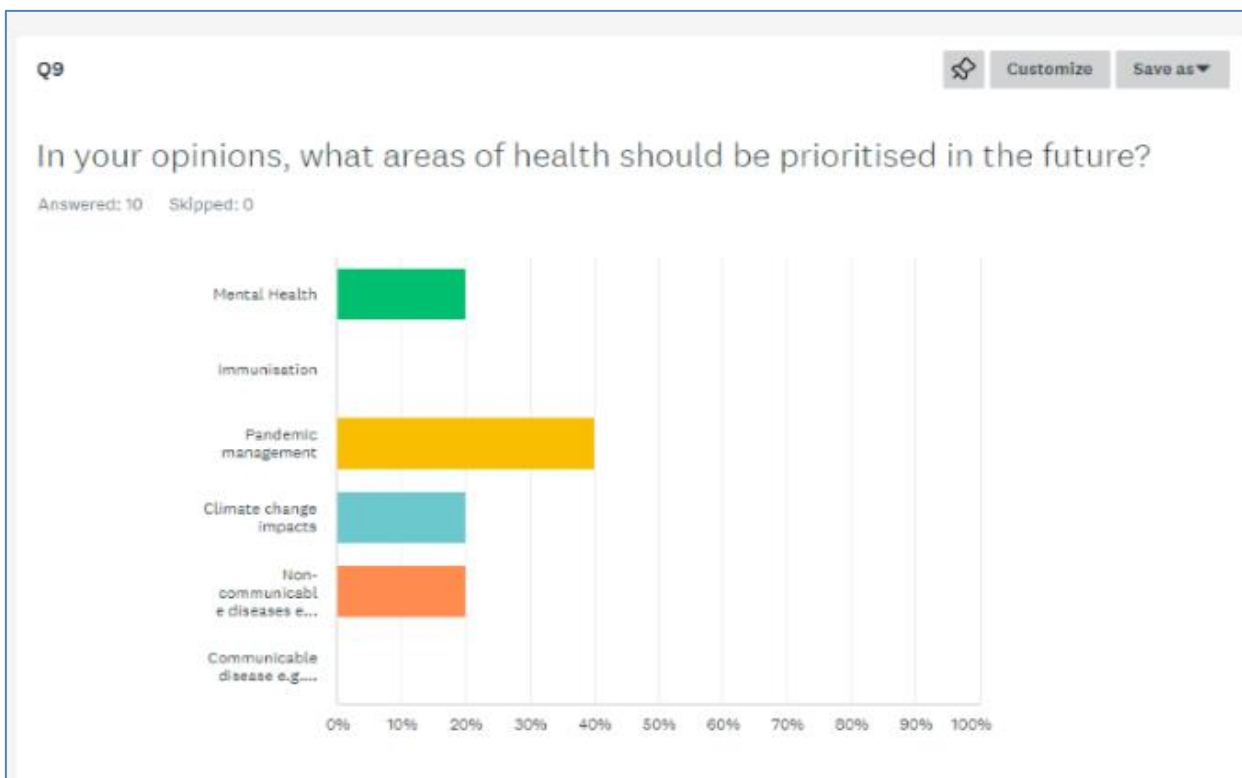
Climate change is an increasingly severe problem currently, and in the future will have large impacts such as contributing to extreme weather, including dangerous heat waves. Beyond being life-threatening, warmer temperatures can lead to a loss of productivity, reduced crop yields and conditions that are optimal for the spread of infectious diseases. WHO is partnering with research institutions around the world to track the health impact and government responses to climate change? As climate change affects all nations, the response to it will have a major positive impact on the world’s public health, and this will allow WHO to be prepared for the challenges they will face when tackling the worse consequences of climate change in the future.

Climate change is a significant health crisis as well as an environmental one, due to many factors directly affecting public health, including:

- air pollution – kills 7 million people every day
- extreme weather events
- malnutrition
- fuels the spread of infectious diseases e.g., malaria

The same emissions that cause global warming are responsible for more than one-quarter of deaths from heart attack, stroke, lung cancer and chronic respiratory disease. Leaders in both WHO and government agencies work together to clean up the air and mitigate the health impacts of climate change. Examples of what WHO has done already to combat this include successfully achieving over 80 cities in more than 50 countries to commit to their air quality guidelines, and to agree to align their air pollution and climate policies. Therefore, WHO is already taking steps to manage this, which further proves its effectiveness as a global organization.

To be an effective in managing climate change and environment issues, WHO aims to support member states in bringing more practicality into the theoretical ideas, as it has the authority and intergovernmental power to enforce guidelines and legislature on a global scale. WHO can guide the health sector’s role in addressing climate change and environmental health issues, and help make connections both at the national and international level, which further proves its effectiveness and utility as a global organization.



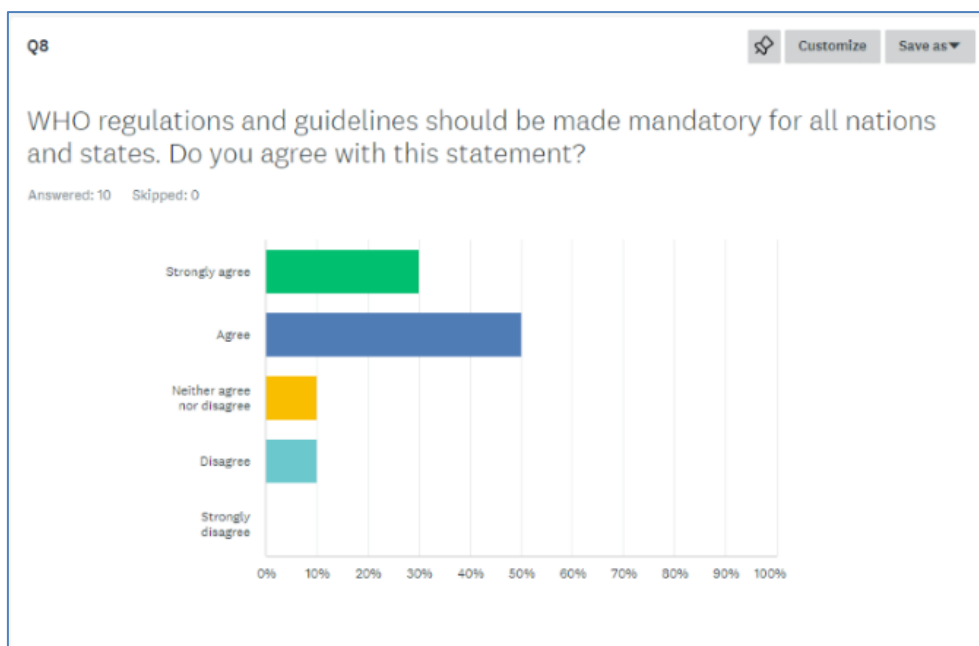
This bar chart from my survey shows that most people thought that pandemic management is something that should be focused on in the future, which suggests that WHO should improve their handling of the pandemic and learn from current situations for the future.

Overall

WHO aims for overall stable world health, in which countries and communities are well prepared to face inevitable changes due to a changing climate and environment and in this WHO will emerge as a strong force for preserving the planet. Therefore, it is highly effective as a global organization because of its future plans and ideals, and its large impact on the outcome of climate change management.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, WHO is very effective as a global organization in different ways, for example in regards to its constitution and initial founding, as this allowed for a solid and dependable foundation from which further reforms and improvements were made. This attitude of the organization is continued throughout the course of its existence, as it aims for many more improvements and growth in the future, and the ambition of WHO proves its effectiveness as a global organization. Its influence internationally is evident in its widely used regulations and guidelines, ensuring that it is mostly credible as the world’s leading authority on public health. While it is highly effective as a global organization in these ways, it is also limited in its structure and overall functioning due to its composition, which needs revising and ameliorating.



Interestingly, the majority of responses answered ‘agree’ to this question on my survey, and this shows that many members of the public feel as if WHO regulations and guidelines should be made mandatory for all countries, and not a single response was ‘strongly disagree’. This further shows the understanding of the public and global population in regards to the importance of WHO guidelines and regulations, which emphasizes its effectiveness and influence across the globe. While WHO is proven to be highly effective in this way, it is limited in closely linked factors such as its structure and overall composition, which affects its functioning and ability to carry out its mission and aims. It is clear that WHO contains the motivation and ambition required to be such a prominent leading world health authority, but without the fundamental and constructive structure to stabilize and secure this ambition, it will remain ineffective as a global organization. Therefore, the institution and agency itself requires reform and improvement in its very structure.

Furthermore, WHO is shown to be effective as an organization due to the funding and international support it receives. With global support on such a large scale, and overall successful influence, WHO is a highly effective global organization as its member states share the responsibility and accountability that is required of them for the organization to be successful – funding and financial stability is crucial for the completion of WHO’s mission. International co-operation and collaboration are also key to this and is an area that WHO’s reduced effectiveness is shown. For example, the actions of the US government display the extent of the criticism that WHO face and the extreme consequences of this on such a dramatic scale, especially at such a critical time. This therefore shows that WHO’s effectiveness as a global organization is limited as it failed to secure the guaranteed support of all member states in time of global health emergency.

Moreover, its effectiveness is also summarized by its past handling and management of events such as the Ebola outbreak – which was considered a failure, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently happening. WHO plays an important role in such large scale emergencies, and therefore it is even more important for it to be played well, especially considering how many poor and developing countries depend on its guidance and help. While the failures of the managing of the Ebola outbreak are significant, it is important to consider how WHO adapted from this and grew as an organization to improve and better its systems of handling healthcare and being the leading global health authority, which has been done successfully. The current pandemic is also proof of how it is learning from its mistakes and putting the lives of people first, which is appreciated across the world. Overall, despite difficulty in getting member states and nations to adhere to WHO’s official regulations and advice, the effort made and improvements and progress from its initial founding are significant and therefore in this way WHO is effective as a global organization.

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