

Health Equity Implications of Climate Change



Sustainable Communities: Making Global Local

Diarmuid O'Donovan

Belfast, March 2011

Health is unequal

- Inequality: unequal
 - difference in size/degree/circumstance
- Inequity: lack of fairness, justice
- Unequal healthcare
 - reinforces poverty, causes social injustice
 - increases morbidity, mortality
- Reducing inequalities is in everyone's interest





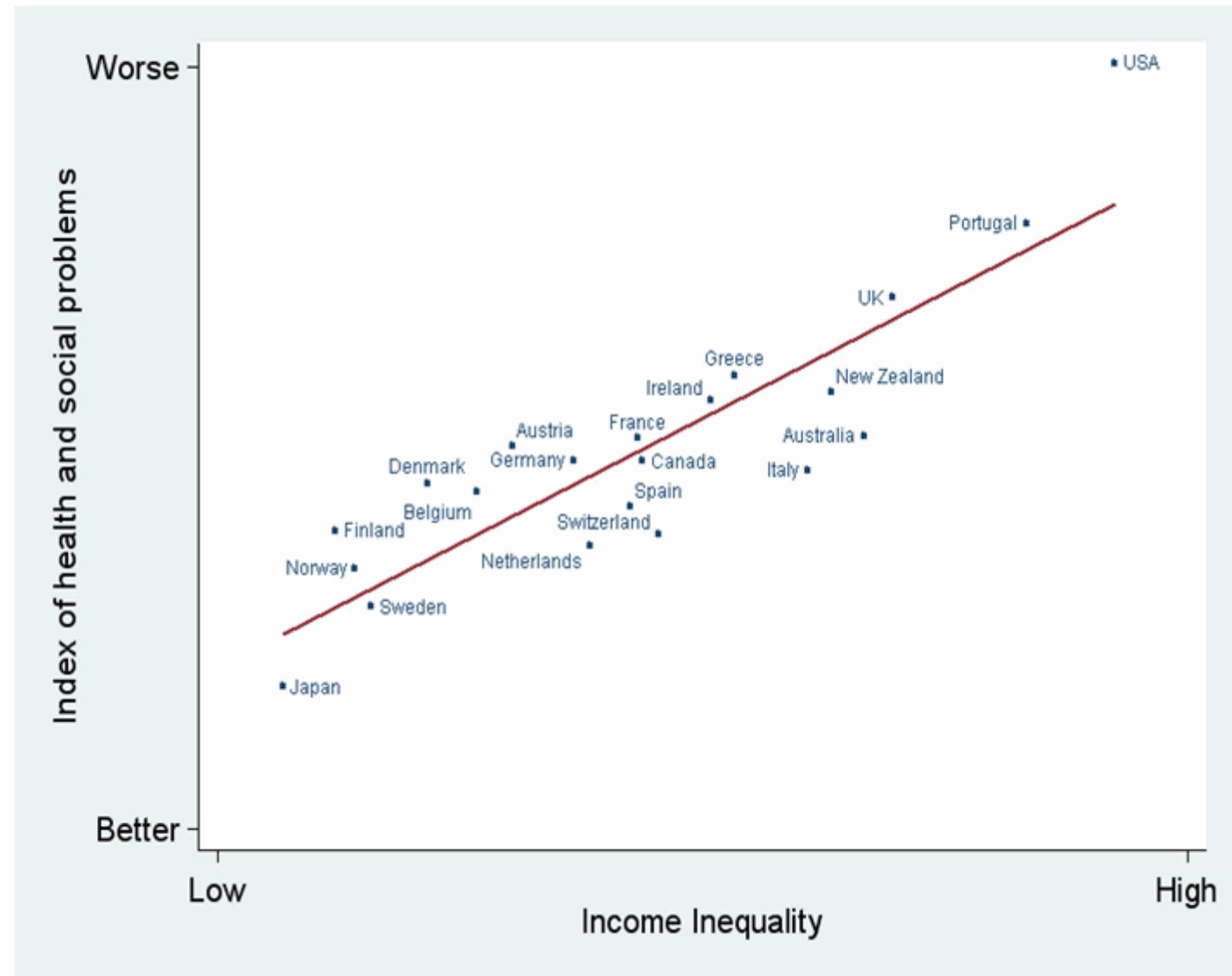
Estimated deaths /year

- Undernutrition:
 - 3.5 million
- Diarrhoea:
 - 2.2 million
- Malaria:
 - 1 million
- Extreme weather:
 - 60,000

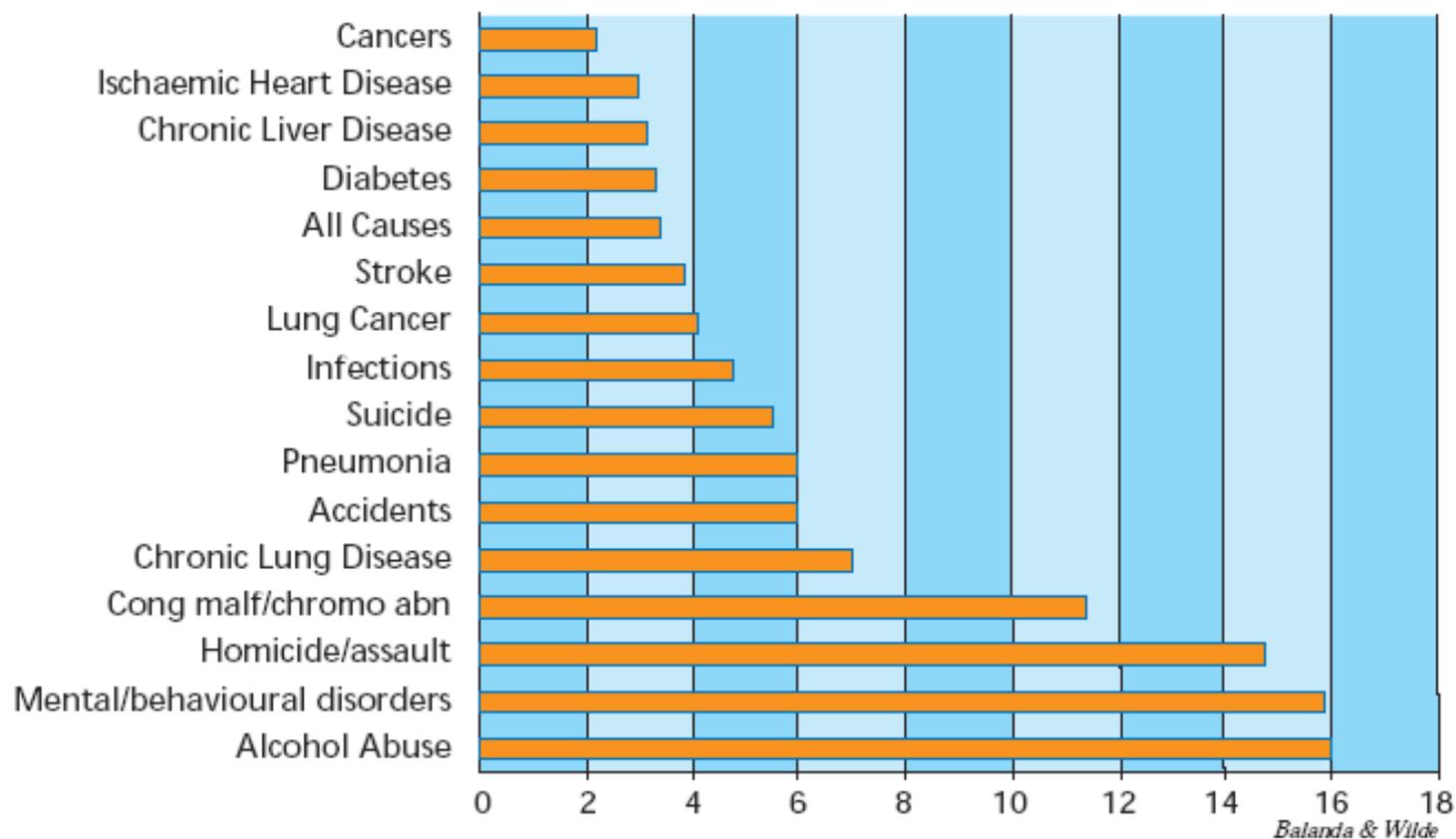
Health and Social Problems are Worse in More Unequal Countries

Index of:

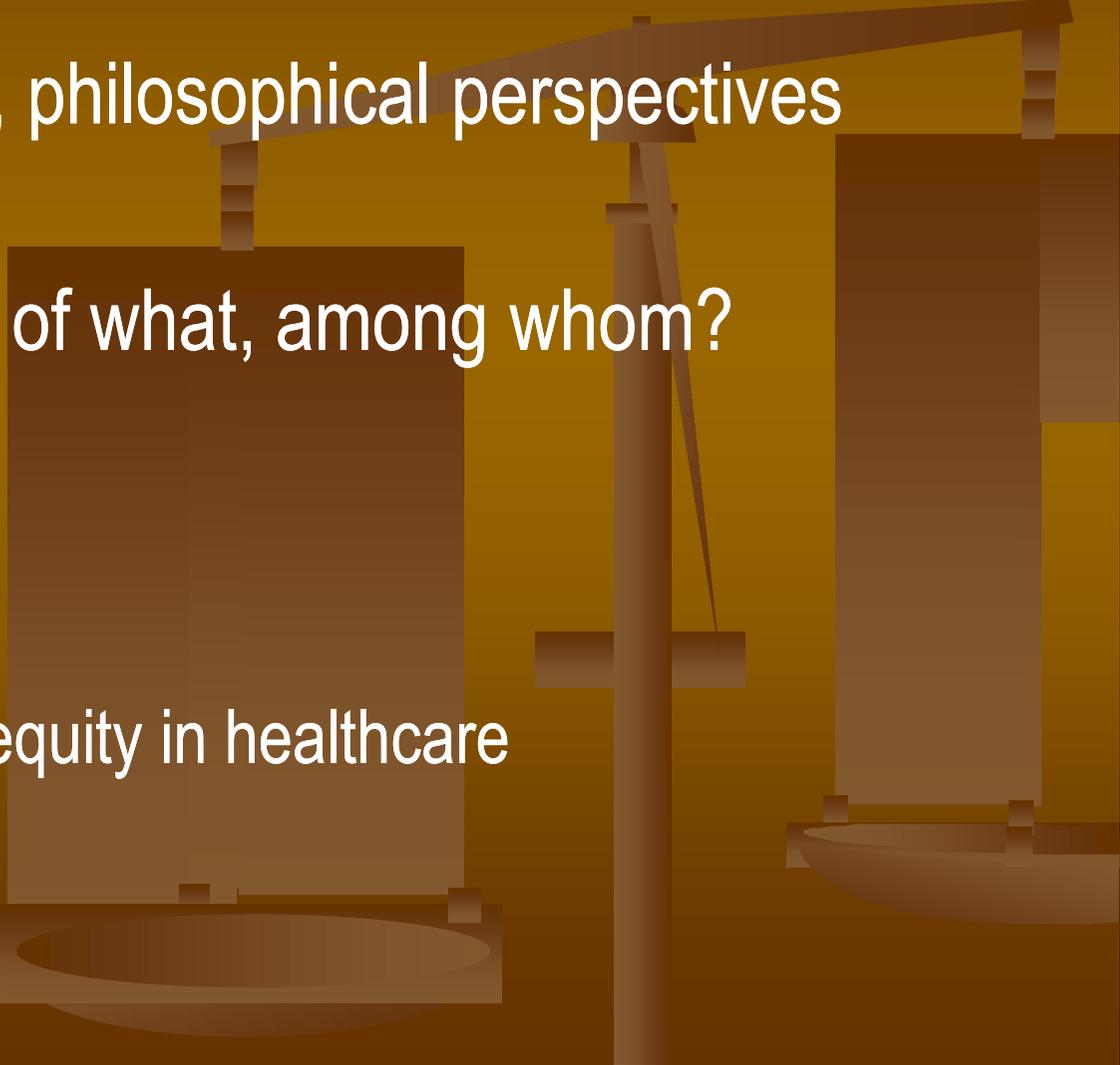
- Life expectancy
- Math & Literacy
- Infant mortality
- Homicides
- Imprisonment
- Teenage births
- Trust
- Obesity
- Mental illness – incl. drug & alcohol addiction
- Social mobility



Relative rates of dying from various causes, comparing highest occupational group with lowest occupational group (Balanda and Wilde, 2001)



Equity



- Different definitions, philosophical perspectives
- Equality / inequality of what, among whom?
 - Amartya Sen
- Health Equity?
 - equity in health vs equity in healthcare

Health equity actions...

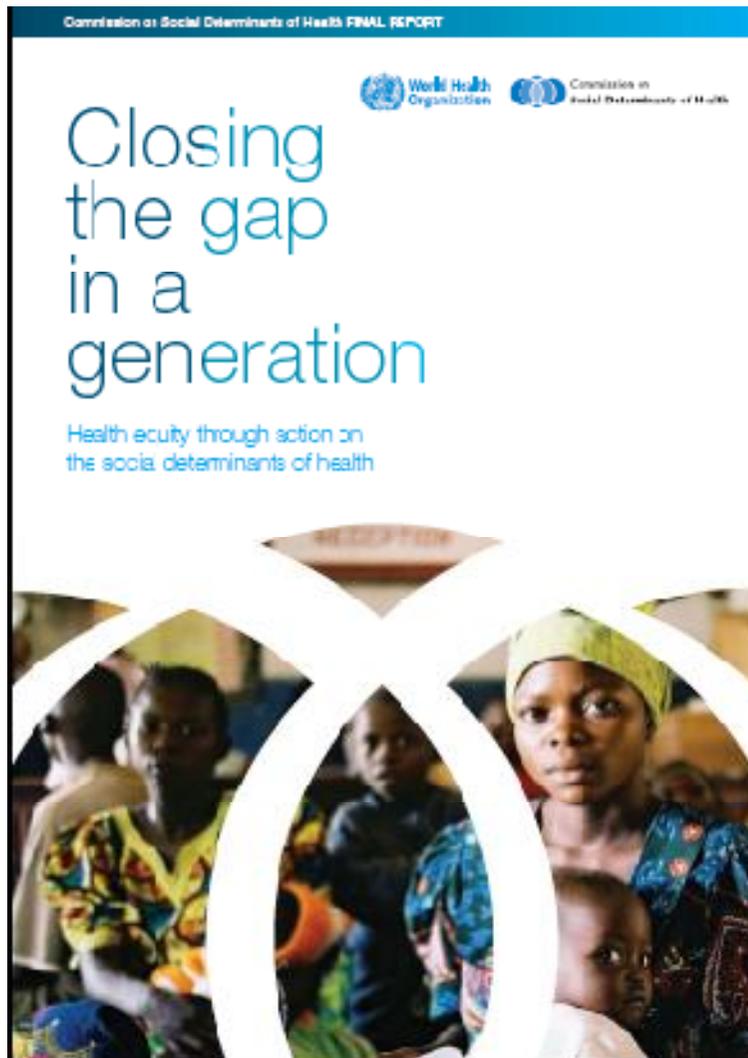
- Improving average health
- Abolishing avoidable inequalities
- ... 'aim should be to bring the health of the worst off up to the level of the best'

Why treat people...



...without changing what makes them sick?

‘Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale’



Improve daily living conditions

Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources

Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action

Life expectancy

Sierra Leone = 42

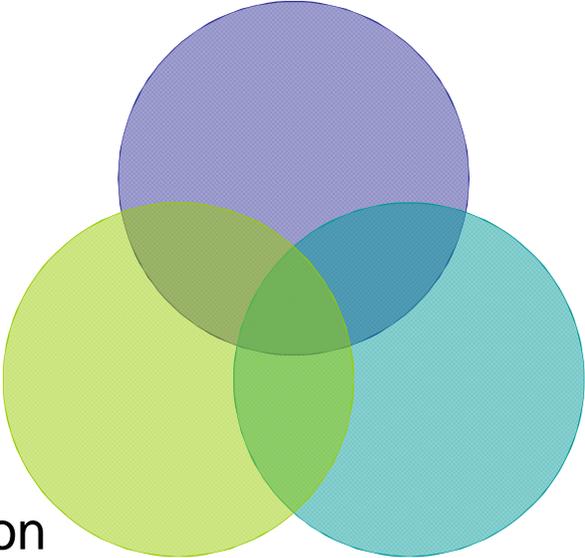
Ireland = 79



Millennium Development Goals



Climate change



Poverty eradication

Health equity

Uneven economic development

- Uneven mobility of capital, technology, knowledge, people
- Uneven gains in power, income, goods, services

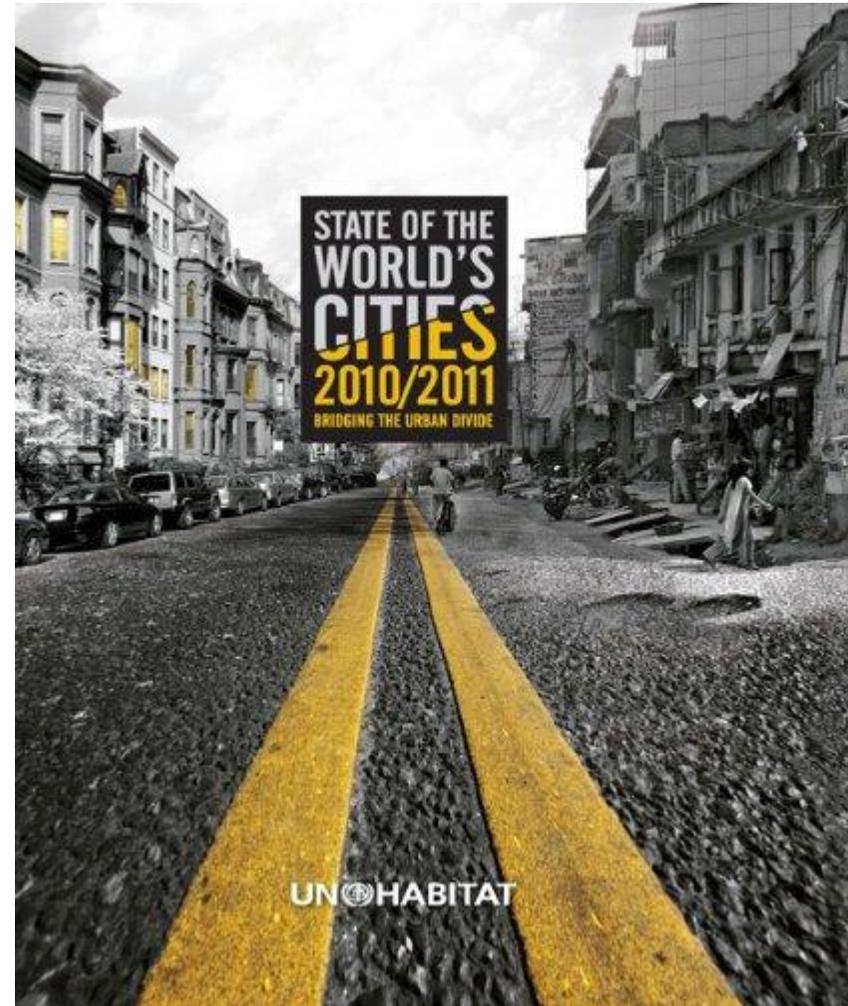
Urbanization

2007

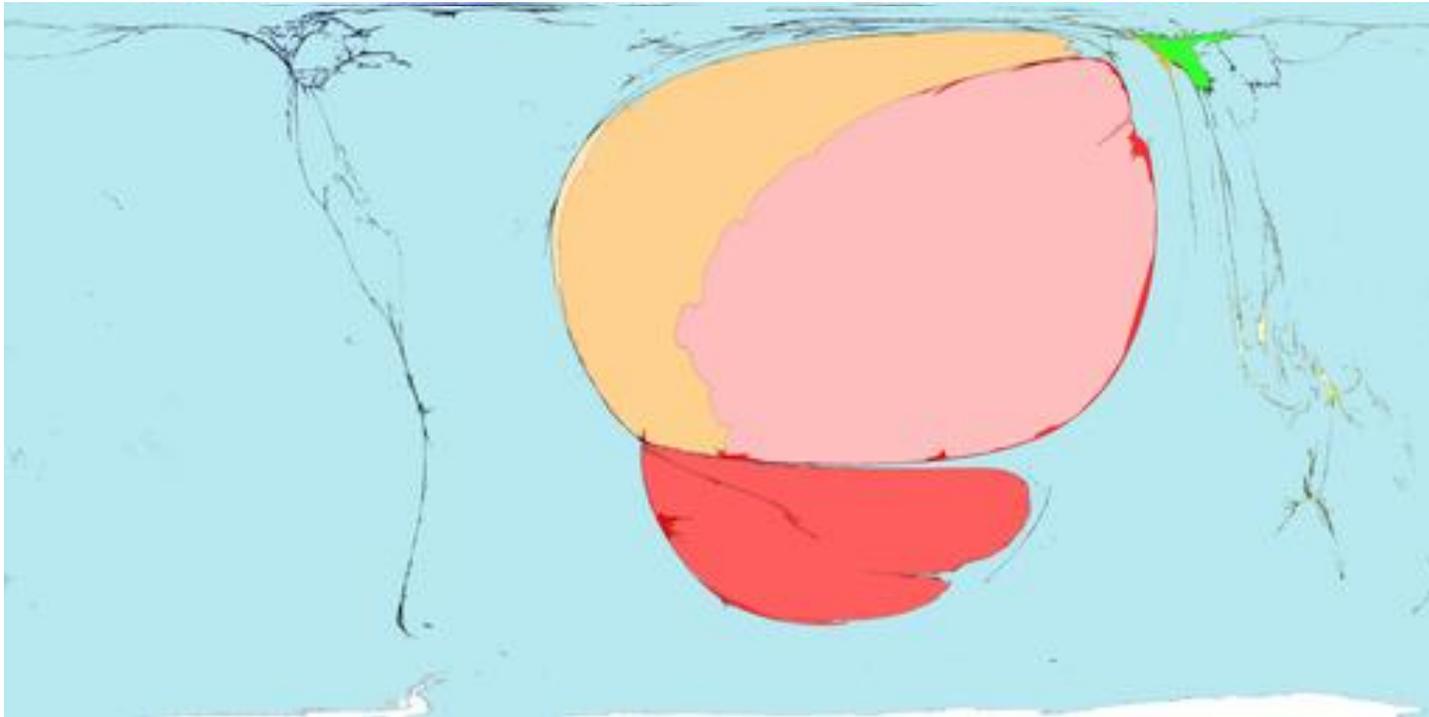
Turning point in history:
urban population overtook the
rural population

Susceptibility to

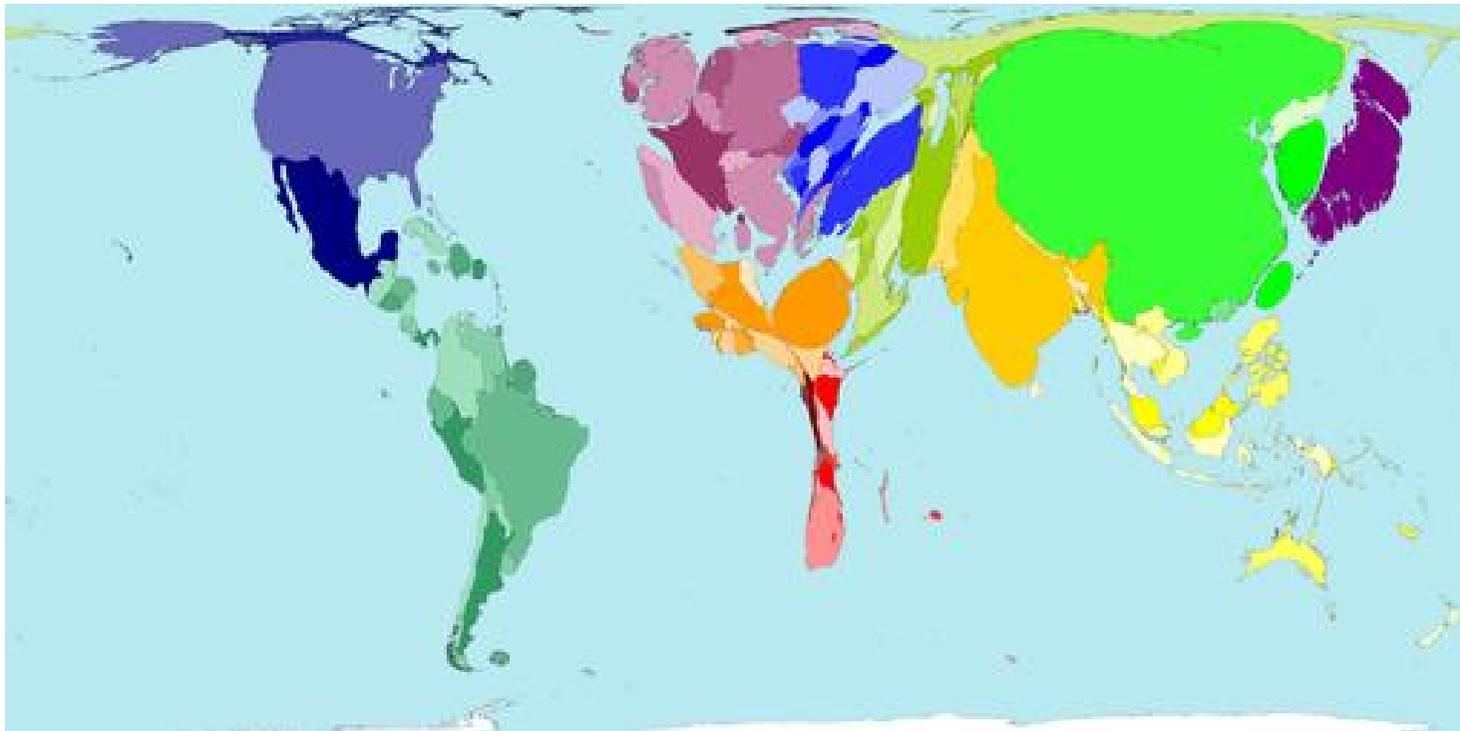
- Heatwaves
- Floods
- Air pollution
- Infectious diseases



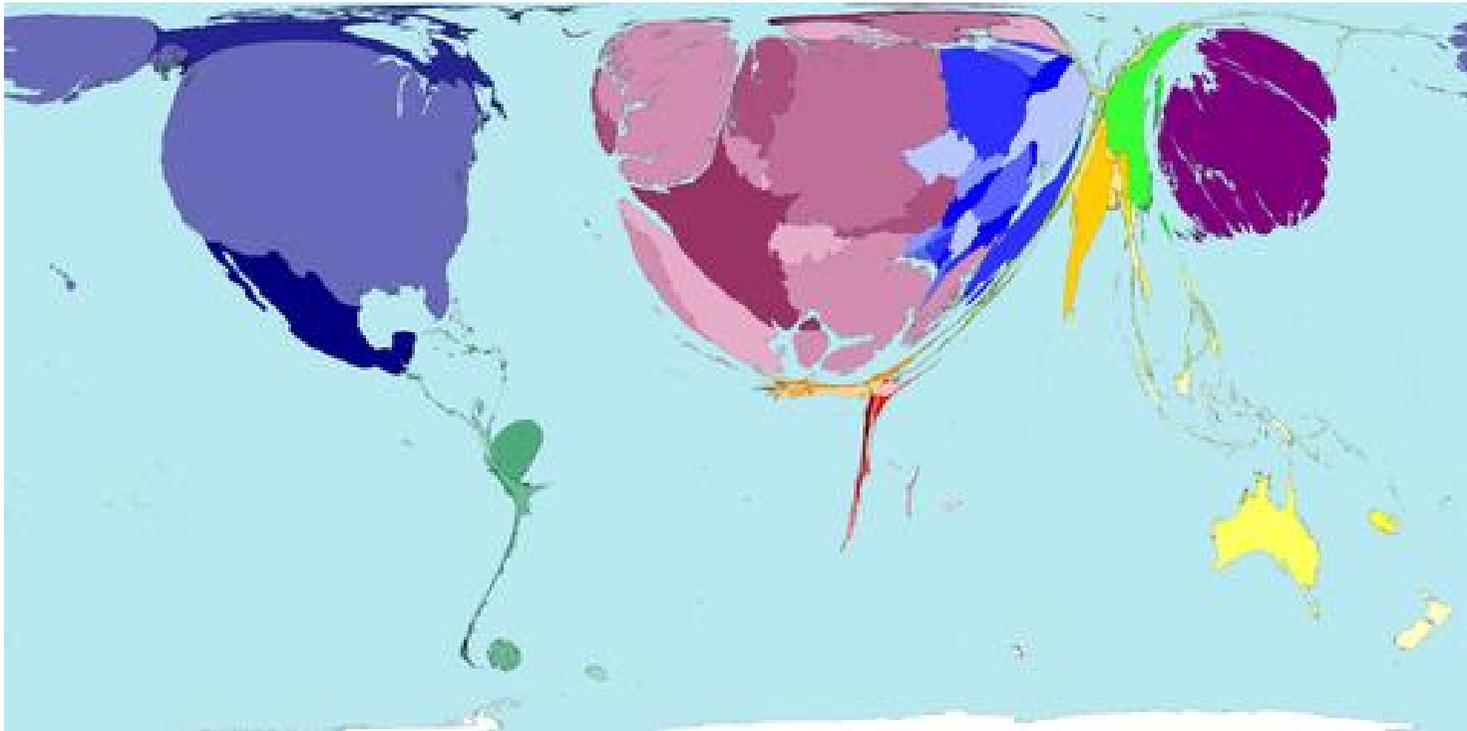
Food



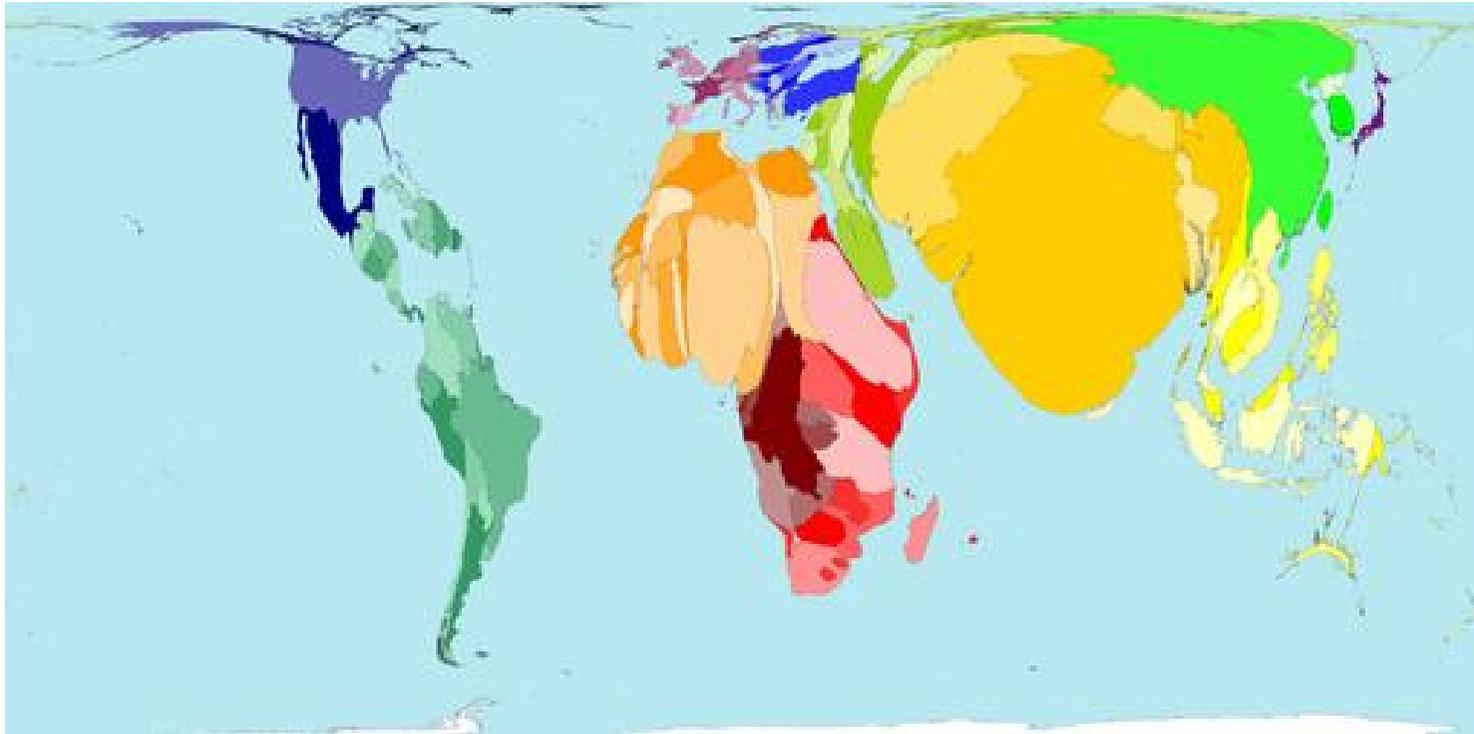
Households connected to a water supply



Sewerage sanitation



Childhood diarrhoea deaths



Vulnerability

- Determined by a community's ability to
 - Anticipate
 - Cope with
 - Resist
 - Recover
- **Need to strengthen and connect sectors and systems**

Impacts of Climate Change on Health Equity

- Burden of disease attributable to climate change
- Disadvantaged communities
 - most vulnerable
 - least resources
- Worsen health inequities
 - natural disasters
 - food and water insecurity
 - changing distribution of diseases

Disproportionate economic impacts on poor

- Prices of basic necessities, energy, insurance
- Employment in agriculture and tourism
- Poor quality housing, infrastructure

Improving health equity can worsen climate change

- Improvements in socioeconomic development usually accompanied by increased emissions
- Infrastructure development requires emissions?
- Deny poor countries economic development: hypocrisy?

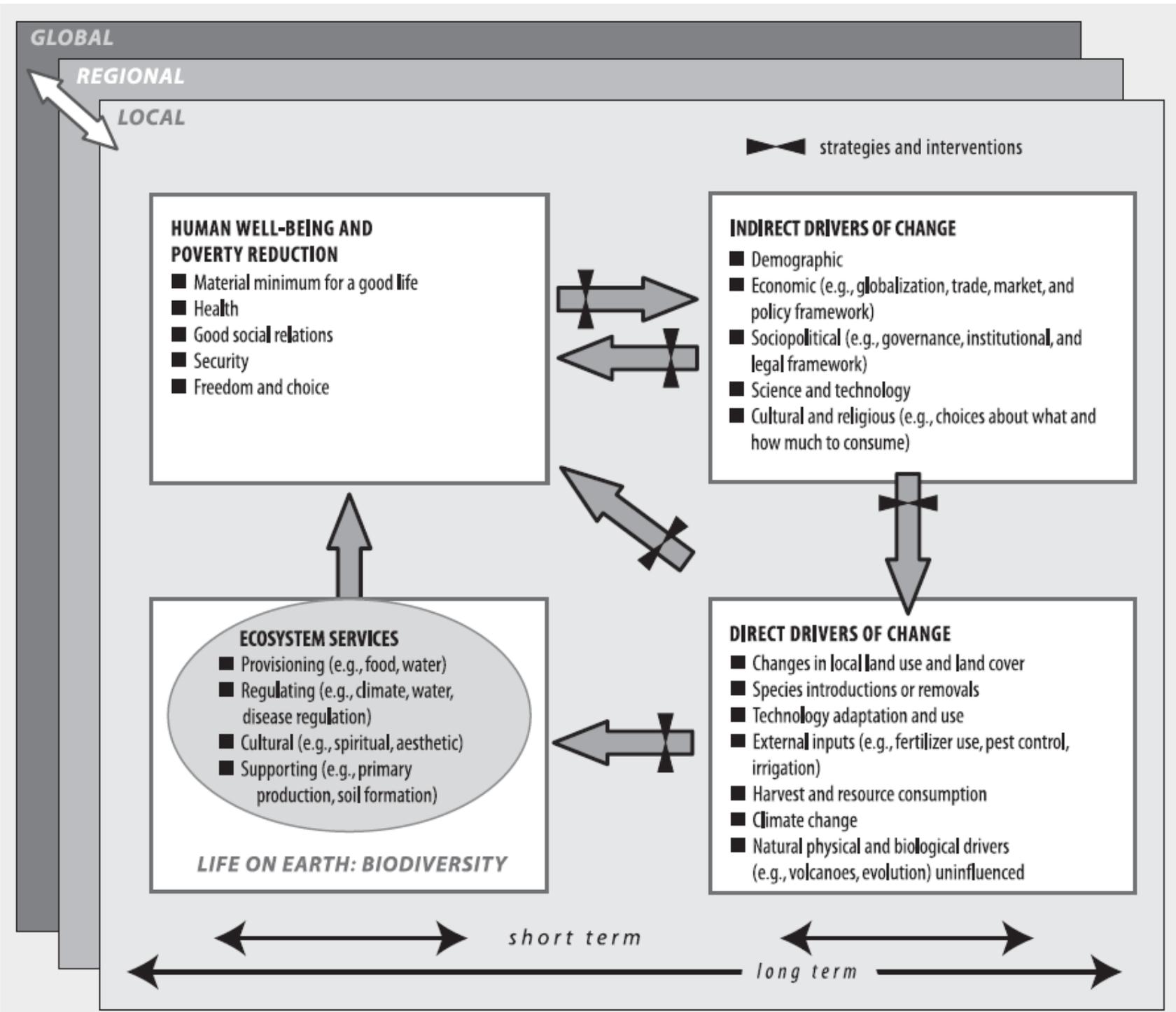
Addressing climate change can harm health and worsen health inequity

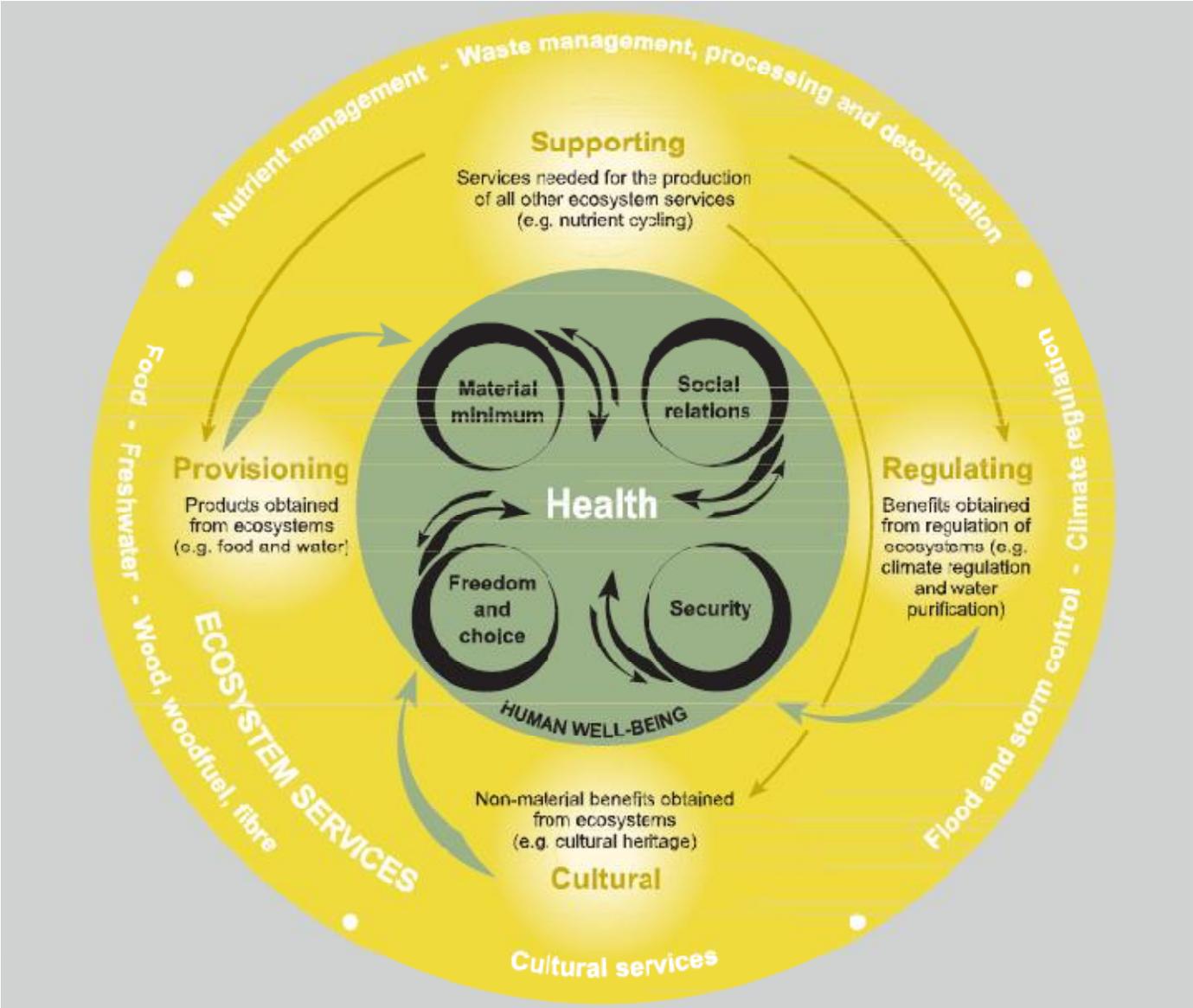
- Policy interventions may be regressive
- Financial burdens greater for those on low incomes
- Less to spend on food, energy, housing, healthcare

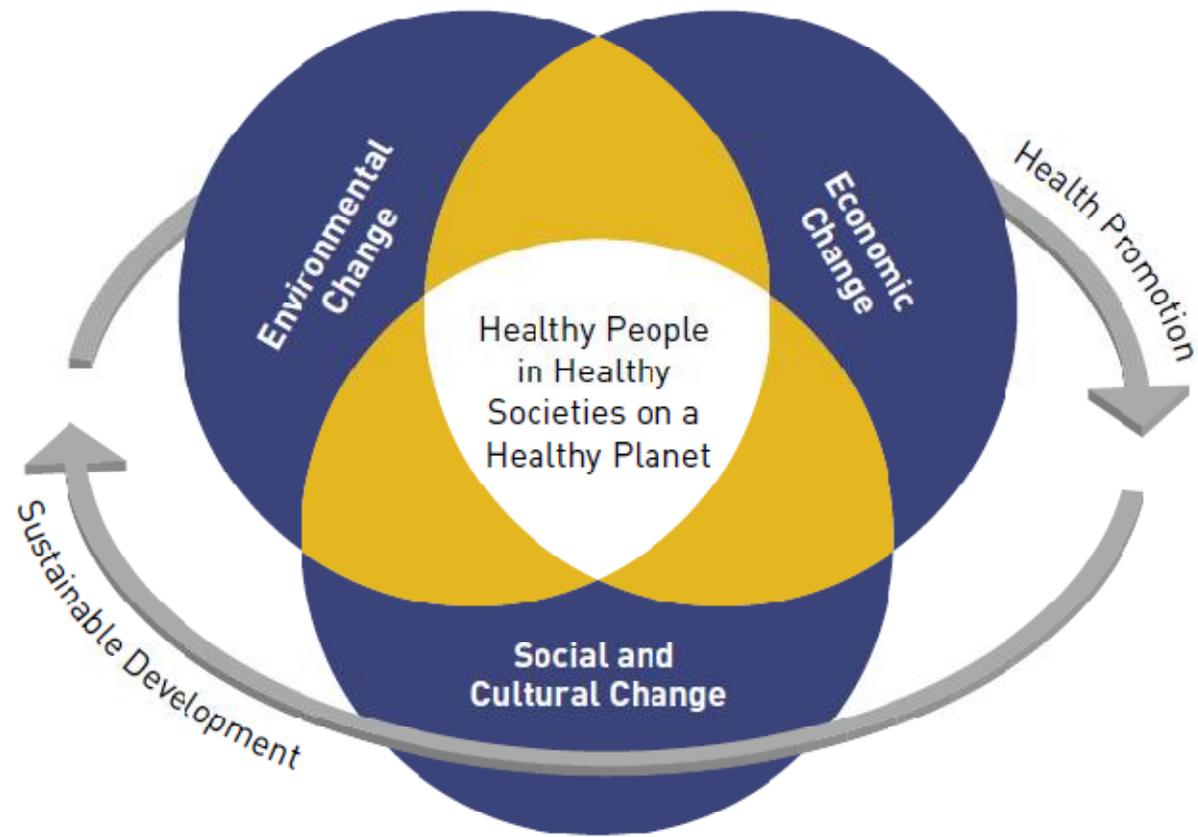
Health is a basic human right



- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - Article 25: everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of themselves and their family, including medical care, social services and security in the event of sickness, disability or old age
- UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
 - Article 12: everyone's right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health







<http://www.iuhpe.org/>

Actions for public health

- Raise awareness
 - health implications
- Strengthen partnerships
 - health in all policies
- Generate evidence
 - health effects
- Strengthen health systems
 - health threats



“Of all forms of inequalities, inequalities in health are the most inhumane”

“Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilisations are written the pathetic words: Too late.”

Martin Luther King

We must make the links