

ABSTRACT

The present Millennium Development Goals are set to expire in 2015 and their next iteration is now being discussed within the international community. With regards to health, the World Health Organization proposes universal health coverage as a 'single overarching health goal' for the next iteration of the Millennium Development Goals. The present Millennium Development Goals have been criticised for being 'duplicative' or even 'competing alternatives' to international human rights law. The question then arises, if universal health coverage would indeed become the single overarching health goal, replacing the present health-related Millennium Development Goals, would that be more consistent with the right to health? The World Health Organization seems to have anticipated the question, as it labels universal health coverage as "by definition, a practical expression of the concern for health equity and the right to health". Rather than waiting for the negotiations to unfold, we thought it would be useful to verify this contention, using a comparative normative analysis. We found that – to be a practical expression of the right to health – at least one element is missing in present authoritative definitions of universal health coverage: a straightforward confirmation that international assistance is essential, not optional. But universal health coverage is a 'work in progress'. A recent proposal by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network proposed universal health coverage with a set of targets, including a target for international assistance, which would turn universal health coverage into a practical expression of the right to health care.