



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

The South Asia program hosted a conference on May 2, 2006, from 9 a.m. till noon on “Public Health and International Security: The Case of India”. The purpose of this half-day conference was to look beyond the immediate issues of HIV/AIDS and the possibility of an avian flu epidemic, both already well ensconced in Washington’s worry list. The conference highlighted how public health fits into the growing U.S.-India relationship, both as an area of cooperation and as a factor in determining India’s medium and long term future. It also examined tools for developing a public health capability in India that can service both the threats we already know about and those that may develop in the future, and that can serve as a center of excellence for dealing with the health issues that threaten international security. The conference put the HIV/AIDS issue in a larger public health context, and related the issue to India’s future at a time when U.S. - India relations are increasingly important.

Ambassador Schaffer began the conference with a discussion on India and the foreign policy implications of international health. She discussed geographic differences in India in economic and social development that are being accentuated in light of the recent improvements in India’s economic performance. Ambassador Schaffer also discussed public health as an international security issue and how vital it is that U.S. policy-makers find the right model of cooperation to supplement the expanding defense and trade relationship with India, so that the health and science issues become a dynamic part of the new partnership.

Panel I, chaired by Dr. Kent Hill, discussed the Indian public health scene; namely public health as a development/strategic problem and as a policy issue. This panel also discussed HIV/AIDS as part of a larger challenge, including chronic disease and future threats like a potential avian flu epidemic. Dr. Ajay Mahal began the discussion by providing a concise analysis of the impact of public health on India’s economy. Next Dr. Bollinger discussed the complexities of dealing with communicable diseases, like the Avian flu, in a country as large as India. Dr. Lal concluded the panel discussion with a comprehensive description of U.S.- India public health partnerships, including the challenges and opportunities involved in making such a partnership work, especially in a country as complex and large as India.

Panel II was moderated by Mr. Walter North and discussed the gaps in public health in the international context. Dr Curran began by discussing HIV/AIDS as an emerging public health problem and the stimulus it provides for broadening the thinking on public health issues. Dr. Miriam Claeson then provided a comprehensive analysis of the critical gaps in essential public health functions in India and possible solutions to bridge these gaps.

Panel II was followed by presentations from Dr. Srinath Reddy and Mr. Rajat Gupta. The Government of India has just announced the creation of a Public Health Foundation and eventually five public health schools in India, in an effort to create a lasting institution that can mobilize India's talent and start filling the gaps, not just in India but also more broadly in the developing world. This foundation will be a unique public-private partnership. Mr. Gupta discussed the importance of such a public-private institution in building capacity within the public health system in India. Dr. Reddy concluded by talking about the fundamental health issues in India, gaps within the current system in addressing these issues and the complex challenges that the public health system in India faces.

The conference ended with a talk by Dr. William Steiger who discussed the importance of U.S-India public health partnerships and the role of the Department of Health and Human Services in addressing India's public health concerns. He delved into a broad range of topics, including the importance of engaging strategic partners like India around health issues.