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Development and Health: Looking for a New Utopia

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Objectives: To present a theoretical and political debate on health reform in Brazil, as well as proposing a new agenda around its objectives in the context of globalization, the re-positioning of the situation of dependence and backwardness in the field of health.

Methodology: Descriptive analytical.

Results: The author discusses the relationship between health, development and economic structure by reviewing some works of contemporary authors. Recent literature refers to evidence of risks associated with the neoliberal vision on health and development.

For the author, Amartya Sen asserts the existence of an inseparable relationship between health and development, since health is a social area that indirectly promotes human capital. Moreover, Deaton questioned the relationship between the rate of economic growth and health conditions, using infant mortality as an indicator. For their part, Acemoglu and Johnson found that increased life expectancy is not related to the growth of per capita income.

On the other hand, Hsiao and Heller mentioned that liberal organizations intervene in the area of health in terms of market failures, risk, and citizenship by itself. The author says that this literature and the dominant liberal agenda emphasize the distributive role of the state in focusing on the most vulnerable and the poor. Furtado also describes a contradiction between the modernization of the productive system and social marginalization, as the functional structure of production is associated with unequal income distribution in Brazil.

After this literature review, the author presents the main objectives of health reform: 1) to review historical and structural factors that characterize Brazilian society as an unequal society and asymmetrically insert into international progress and technical learning, whose factors are divorced from local needs, 2) re-thinking health, according to its structural connection with equitable economic development, as well as environmental sustainability and political mobilization of society, and 3) to meet the challenge of articulation and implementation of the principles of universality, fairness and integrity of the health system through the transformation of the productive complex in health. For the author, this transformation consists mainly on increasing the importance of that kind of production of health goods and services that meets social demands and incorporate new technological paradigms.

Conclusion: The review of health reform in Brazil reveals an unfinished health development. The author proposes a new agenda focused on the use of new technologies and knowledge to achieve a balance between the needs of the population and the current world situation.