

Conference report

Opening Plenary - #GetBackOnTrack – what is solidarity?

Get back on track: Opening Panel

By Daniel Townsend, Berlin



This article was written on the occasion of our conference held with partner organisations on 08 September 2022: "Get back on track! The Global Fund's contribution to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals". We asked Daniel Townsend, Constituency Focal Point for Developed Country NGO Delegation for the Global Fund, Berlin, to write about his impressions of the opening panel "#GetBackOnTrack!", taking into account the perspective of communities living with HIV, TB and malaria. We deliberately did not ask for an objective account of the discussions and the proceedings of the session. We would like to thank Daniel for his contribution!

Moderators: Raminta Stuikyte, Senior Advisor, Underserved Population Program, Lithuania and **Andreas Hübers**, Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW)

The COVID-19 pandemic has set us back even further. But the pandemic also demonstrated that this could not be tackled by the health sector alone. It requires inter-sectoral cooperation in coordination with communities to address the broader determinants of health. This is the only way we will achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) targets and meet the needs of key affected populations. I commend the Global Fund for putting communities at the center of its new strategy that fully supports the Global Funds replenishment. We remain fully committed to our continued partnership. And we work together to end the epidemics of HIV, TB and Malaria for a healthier, safer, fairer world.

- ***Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Director-General of the World Health Organization*

This session was opened by **Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul**, Executive Board Friends of the Global Fund Europe and **Tilman Rüppel**, Executive Board of Action against AIDS Germany.

Tilman Rüppel, who stressed the importance of the investment case and the role that GF plays in achieving universal health coverage and meeting the pressing challenges that HIV, tuberculosis and Malaria presents. Stressing the importance of this present moment, he provided an overview of the panel and discussion that centers on Germany's role as a Global health leader. He stressed the importance of the Global Fund as an important institution in global health architecture. It should be replenished to fulfil its mission and mandate, which has been threatened since the Covid Pandemic. As a Global health leader, Germany continues to demonstrate its commitment to actualizing a multilateral ecosystem that can respond to the world's most pressing challenges. The audience applauded Germany's increased contribution, which was announced earlier that morning.

The panellists, **Bettina Hagedorn**, vice chair of the German budget in the Bundestag, **Svenja Schulze**, Bundesministerin für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, **Peter Sands**, Executive Director, The Global Fund to Fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria, **Valeria Rachinska**, Director for Human Rights, Gender and Community Development, 100% Coalition and **Efraim Gomez**, Chief of Staff, UNAIDS.



Foto: Svenja Schulze, Federal Minister für cooperation and development

The first question, 'what does the Global Fund need in the next three years?' was posed to Minister **Svenja Schulze**. She responded and reiterated that Germany is convinced that GF does essential work and endorses the strategy, which must be funded.

Germany raised its ambition through direct funding to the Global Fund and debt swaps to allow these countries to provide more direct investment in health and resources. She expressed support for the Global Fund's new strategy affirming that Germany believes in the long-term vision and mandate of the Global Fund. She further stressed that though Germany has met the replenishment target, it will continue to pursue other

measures, such as debt swaps for lower-income countries and other macroeconomic reforms to mobilize funds for higher domestic spending. She stressed that Germany would continue pushing key G7 allies to ensure they meet the replenishment target.



Foto: Opening panel: from left to right: Raminta Stuikyte, Bettina Hagedorn, Efraim Gomez, Svenja Schulze, Valeria Rachinska and Andreas Hübers

Peter Sands was asked, 'What will success be for you on the day of the replenishment, and what's the reception in the next three years? But also, what may be in your view are the scenarios that expect us concerning pandemics if we don't meet the ambition?' He congratulated the German government and its continued commitment to the global health agenda and many people's lives worldwide. He further acknowledged the leadership displayed by Minister Schulze, whose successful efforts were achieved in the face of tremendous competing priorities. Citing his experience in Tanzania, he noted that the Global Fund is a success that can be easily seen in everyday life. At the same

time, there are key challenges, such as protecting the rights of Adolescent Girls and



Foto: Efraim Gomez and former minister of Heidemarie Wiezcorek-Zeul

Young Women, stigma and discrimination, bolstering critical infrastructure to deliver Tuberculosis programs, and implementing robust programming to fight against Malaria. Continuing with the Tanzanian example, he noted that while the Global Fund has been able to provide needed funds to bolster mobile TB diagnostic vehicles, Tanzania, one of Africa's largest countries, has only five. He points to this as a glaring example, a clear case for the Global Fund. Its mission and work are still valid, and he urged the Global Health community not to give up on it.

Gender inequalities, human rights and enabling communities to protect and care for themselves rather than relying purely on the health system. More resilient systems for health are needed to protect people from future pathogens, and to do so will require leadership from countries such as Germany, and it will take money.

- **Peter Sands**, Executive Director, The Global Fund to Fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria



Foto: Valeria Rachinska together with Andreas Hübers

What needs to happen to end inequalities?

The session was then followed by an open discussion among the panellists with the first question, 'How to make the Global Fund money work? What needs to happen to end inequalities? Why is that important?' **Efraim Gomez** noted that the SDGs explicitly fuel the end of HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria. He stated that addressing inequalities is the blueprint of the AIDS response. Firstly, there are inequalities within the HIV response that urgently require the attention of the Global Health community. The disparity in the HIV response between high-income and low-income countries must be urgently addressed, and we must seek to do now. After, we must address the inequalities that affect the response and continue to make some countries vulnerable to new HIV, TB

and Malaria infections, as well as new pandemics. He contends that we must address inequalities at the community level. For example, we could do more to ensure that children living with HIV have access to life-saving anti-retroviral medications (ARV); presently, only half of those who need them have access. He closed his remarks by urging the audience to do more to meet the needs of key population groups and the syndemics of HIV, which continue to fuel the epidemics in these communities.

What does solidarity mean to you?



Foto: Valeria Rachinska

Valeria Rachinska was asked in the context of the Ukraine war, "What does solidarity mean to you?" and "What does it mean to put communities at the center?". She powerfully explained that the Global Fund has not failed communities impacted by the Russian war. Acknowledging the release of emergency funds in the very early days of the war, she applauded the Global Fund. Due to the immediate assistance provided by

the Global Fund, Ukraine has not run out of the necessary ARV drugs. It continues to cooperate with community partners in addition to significant grantees, which has improved our stature in national dialogues.

Communities need resources in times of crisis; resources save lives and give us hope to fight, and that is what solidarity means.

- **Valeria Rachinska**, Director for Human Rights, Gender and Community Development, 100% Coalition

The author:



Daniel Townsend is the Constituency Focal Point for Developed Country NGO Delegation. He has over 15 years of experience in global health policy and communications advocacy, with significant experience designing policy for populations and communities facing multidimensional and intersectional barriers to health.

More information

Action against AIDS

info@aid-kampagne.de

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Photos: Alexej Stoljarov