

Conference report from a community perspective

First session:

#GetBackOnTrack: are we on the road to ending AIDS?

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This paper was presented at 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 Oxana Rucsineanu to write about her impressions of the first panel discussion on "#GetBackOnTrack! Ending AIDS", 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. The text was translated by us from English into German. We would like to thank Oksana for her contribution!



Are we on track to end Aids?

As a TB advocate participation in the Conference marking the conclusion of the joint work of the organising partners for the 7th Replenishment Conference was a great opportunity to once again highlight the importance of the Global Fund for the survival of people living with HIV, TB and malaria and its support for community systems strengthening.



Tilman Ruppel, Executive Board of Action against AIDS Germany, in his introduction to the audience mentioned that the Global Fund provides 25% of international funding for HIV programs. Since the peak of the epidemic in 2004, AIDS-related deaths in Global Fund partner countries have considerably declined. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and economic and humanitarian crises have negatively affected the global HIV/AIDS response leading to immense setbacks, the annual decline in HIV infections slowed alarmingly, falling back to the level of 2016. Structurally disadvantaged people and people living in poverty, girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa, MSM and other LGBTI communities, sex workers, people who use drugs and people in detention being even more at risk than before. The Global Fund and UNAIDS have already made important contributions to end AIDS and reduce inequalities to access. The involvement of local communities and key groups leads to successes in health system strengthening, being a critical component. Therefore, it is necessary to further strengthen the health systems empowered by community engagement and to give them sufficient power to shape the systems which is not possible without political will. This is the only way for achieving profound changes and to defeat AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

The moderated discussion on GetBackonTrack - Ending AIDS by **Tanja Siebenbrodt**, Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW) and **Marwin Meier**, Action against AIDS Germany and World Vision Germany, with key players in HIV/AIDS response (**Efraim Gomez**, UNAIDS Chief of Staff; **Olivia Ngou**, GFAN speaker, Executive Director of Impact Sante Afrique and Global Coordinator at Civil Society for Malaria, Cameroon; **Svenja Schulze**, Minister for Economic Cooperation and development in the cabinet of Olaf Scholtz; **Bettina Hagedorn**, Deputy Chairwoman of the Budget Committee in the German Bundestag and **Raminta Stuikyte**, Member of the Technical Review Panel of the Global Fund, Lithuania) led to fruitful discussions encompassing a range of questions addressed from the audience present in the conference room. Challenges and lessons learned were the focus of the session, culminating with practical examples of tackling the bottlenecks and the role and pressure to determine political way to support the right decisions.

ARE WE ON TRACK TO END AIDS



Questions addressed on the overall AIDS situation globally highlighted the actual status quo of the AIDS epidemic, by strong and evidence-based statements “of not being on track, and even moving substantially back” (Efraim Gomez), being mentioned that the targets “even before the Russian invasion were far from being achieved in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA); the region facing the fastest growing HIV epidemic in the world with only 50% of those diagnosed put on treatment and with 1/5 of TB burden globally”. According to Global Fund Technical Review Panel, inequities are not sufficiently addressed (55% gender related barriers), resources preponderantly are being used more to direct and not catalytic investment. Additionally, there is not enough integration and sustainability challenges are not addressed properly by the affected countries (Raminta Stuikyte), co-opted with lack of political will and actions to enhance policy environment (Efraim Gomez).

WHAT COMMUNITIES DO AND COULD DO

The session touched upon the essential role communities play in addressing HIV/AIDS in the affected countries. Despite the CSOs and communities’ efforts and strong commitments to test, prevent and treat, the overall governments in those countries still have limited resources, therefore support from countries such as Germany is extremely critical. With people lives at stake, numerous legal inequities (due to the lack of data that might support the need to provide services), marginalised and stigmatised communities (such as trans people) continue to face barriers all over the globe. However namely, community engagement helps keep governments accountable through community led monitoring (CLM) initiatives and strong advocacy to increase domestic funding (Olivia Ngou). Good examples of tackling the epidemic in Vietnam and Zimbabwe (Efraim Gomez) and “miracles” happening to seeing representatives of trans people, sex workers, men having sex with men and policy-makers discussing all around at one table in country coordinating mechanisms (CCM), empowered in their networks, due to strong engagement of communities supported by the Global Fund.

WHAT COMES NEXT UNFINISHED BUSINESS



To regain the gains several actions should be continued, strengthened or redesigned in order to ensure people centred care:

- ✓ Reboot “preventive measures, including among girls and women as prevention is key, deliver complex solutions to most needed to ensure access based on gender and human rights, strengthen Country coordination mechanisms (CCM) and empower communities to access Global Fund, community led monitoring (CLM)” (Efraim Gomez);
- ✓ Rebuild “logistic chains affected by the invasion, think smarter how to use the money”, align targets to address inequities, and ensure prioritisation goes to the highest impact, to deliver holistically responses (Raminta Stuikyte);
- ✓ Continue the work with the Global Fund to support communities to grow stronger to be able to demand changes and engage with policy-makers (Olivia Ngou).

WHAT POLITICIANS COULD DO: ROLE AND PRESSURE



Having high level German decision makers at the conference was in itself an extremely important step showing strong commitment of the German Bundestag (on behalf of German citizen) to play its important role in the Global Fund replenishment. A pledge of 1,3 billion € has been announced in the morning press-conference, prior the event. During the session, experiences of having the engagement fulfilled,

related to day-to-day work in policy-making for over 20 years in a wide range of ministers (Bettina Hagedorn), crises in the country and abroad (COVID-19, climate change, the war in Ukraine, inflation rate etc.), challenges related to shortages leading to the need to cut from one minister and to give to another, in the same time, bridging the young Government – all of that actually made Germany stronger than before, with a lesson learned that “it is important never to save in crisis but invest more” finding the balance in addressing the issues faced “not only by the German people but the rest of the world as well” (Bettina Hagedorn, Svenja Schulze).

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE AUDIENCE

Questions raised from the audience brought into focus additional challenges leading to constructive and at some point to “less pleasant” impressions. The unexpectedly fundraising campaign for UNAIDS, culminated with transparent and straight forward statements from the policy-makers on acknowledgement and appreciation for UNDAIDS’



work, but in the same time the common sense of the government to decide and implement what is right for people. During the debates, it was stated that there are as well other important players to fight TB and malaria in the GF architecture (Stop TB Partnership, RBM Partnership to End Malaria etc.).

Challenges for people ageing with HIV, nutrition deficiency and sustainability for civil society organizations (CSOs) highlighted as particularly hard or insufficiently addressed by the Global Fund, raised thoughts whether the GF has enough instruments, mechanisms or civil society/community representation at the Global Fund board to discuss those questions and respond to them properly.

In the conclusion, many of the questions underlined the issues that need further and broader integration into universal health coverage (UHC) and therefore joint efforts are needed to beat HIV. Above that CSOs should continue raise and advocate that governments fulfil their responsibilities.

Special thanks to the federal government of Germany for committing 1,3 billion € to Global Fund

** One thing was missing - an integrated discussion/debate to elaborate on common challenges in addressing all three TB, HIV and malaria epidemics based on holistically approaches that might be used in the future.#

The autor

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