

# The Global Fund and Local Health Systems: Building Foundations to End HIV, TB, Malaria and Tackle Emerging Pandemics

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Resilient health systems are not only essential to end the epidemics of HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria, but also create healthier, more prosperous communities and help prepare for emerging pandemics and health security threats. In order to be resilient, a health system should include six primary building blocks: country leadership and community engagement, strong health service delivery, a well-trained health workforce, functional health information management systems, access to high quality medical products and technologies and adequate domestic health financing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has [disrupted health services](#) critical to ending the HIV, TB and malaria epidemics and [has exposed the deficiencies of weak health systems](#) in low- and middle-income countries with which the Global Fund partners. With stronger health systems, more people have access to adequate health care and countries can better respond to current and future health security threats.

As an international partnership working to end the HIV, TB and malaria epidemics with governments, the private sector, civil society groups and

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bilateral partners, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) operates based on the premise that in order to achieve results against the three diseases, investments in health systems are necessary. It acts upon this need to invest in health systems in order to lay the foundation for an effective, efficient and sustainable response to the HIV, TB and malaria epidemics. As a result, investment in resilient and sustainable health systems is a core component of the Global Fund's strategy, which is committed to deploy on average \$1.33 billion per year over 2021-2023 to build capacities and infrastructure towards diagnostic laboratories, disease surveillance systems, procurement and supply chain management systems and training and career development of health care workers.<sup>1</sup> As a [2020 Lancet study found](#), over one-third of investments made by the Global Fund in implementing countries strengthen health security.

In light of the threats posed by COVID-19, the Global Fund introduced the [COVID-19 Response Mechanism](#) in March of 2020, which has focused on mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on HIV, TB and malaria responses by tackling constraints in health systems. Countries with comparatively stronger health systems, due in part to Global Fund investments over several years, have been in a better position to weather COVID-19. [Rwanda is an example](#), but it still benefited from additional

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/8279/publication\\_sixthreplenishmentinvestmentcase\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/8279/publication_sixthreplenishmentinvestmentcase_report_en.pdf), page 37



help from the Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism – with funding covering COVID-19 diagnostic testing and measures to mitigate COVID-19's disruption of HIV, TB and malaria programs.<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 reminds us that we need to bolster essential components of health systems and improve country responses to global health security threats.

## Country Leadership and Community Engagement

Developing countries taking responsibility for shaping national health responses and coordinating measures with civil society groups and local communities are essential to establishing agile health systems. Government transparency and effective coordination between stakeholders is critical to addressing current and future public health threats.<sup>3</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for clear communication between authorities, community health professionals and civil society to effectively implement containment measures (including lockdowns) in order to curb the spread of the virus while maintaining access to health care

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/covid-19/grants/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.who.int/healthsystems/EN\\_HSSkeycomponents.pdf](https://www.who.int/healthsystems/EN_HSSkeycomponents.pdf)

to marginalized populations. Organized local government capacity and a vital dialogue with civil society partners also allows countries to learn from previous epidemics, as was evident in the responses to COVID-19 by Asian countries that had experience with SARS in 2003.<sup>4</sup>

## Strong Health Systems Enable Progress on AIDS, TB and Malaria

Delivering integrated, people-centered health services – ranging from prevention to treatment – improves HIV, TB and malaria outcomes within communities. Examples of key interventions in health service delivery include early diagnosis of HIV in infants, screenings for TB among pregnant women and girls, as well as prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.<sup>5</sup> The Global Fund has focused several of its investments in sexual and reproductive health services including screening and testing of sexually transmitted infections, post-violence care and antenatal care. Often these services are the first point of contact with health systems for key and vulnerable populations. An integrated approach to sexual and reproductive health services with emphasis on addressing discrimination and violence against these vulnerable groups has proven to be critical in the response to the HIV epidemic.<sup>6</sup>

## A Well-Trained Health Workforce

Training and rapidly deploying community health workers is a vital component in strengthening health systems for low- and middle-income countries. Communities place enormous trust in these workers, especially in areas with limited resources.<sup>7</sup> There are more than two million community health workers in the countries

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559804/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate\\_2020resultsreport\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate_2020resultsreport_report_en.pdf), page 50

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate\\_2020resultsreport\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate_2020resultsreport_report_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate\\_2020resultsreport\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate_2020resultsreport_report_en.pdf)

where the Global Fund invests, mainly serving rural and hard-to reach populations. The Global Fund invested a total \$100 million to bolster their capacity and that of community systems in its 2017-2019 allocation cycle.<sup>8</sup> In Zambia, the Global Fund supports the education of 500 community health assistants a year. These workers have a large presence in rural areas and improve access to preventative and treatment services.<sup>9</sup> The Global Fund also invests in community-led monitoring to support assessment of the effectiveness, quality, accessibility and equity of health services received. For example, Rights Evidence-Action (REAct) is a community-based system for monitoring and responding to human rights violations among key populations affected by HIV and TB in over 22 countries, including many in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>10</sup>

## Functional Health Information Management Systems

By maintaining and updating a functional health information management system, countries are better prepared for potential health threats. Collaborating with partners, the Global Fund is supporting the rollout and maintenance of electronic, integrated national health management information systems in over 30 countries.<sup>11</sup> As demonstrated by the 2015 Ebola outbreaks, frequently updated data helps countries to adapt to adverse conditions and efficiently create short and long-term solutions informed by real-

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time information and learning from previous experiences.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the Global Fund has developed a real-time monitoring approach to collect information on COVID-19's impact on AIDS, TB and malaria programming, which informs local and collective responses.<sup>13</sup>

The Global Fund, with over 40 percent of its funding allocated towards medicines and other health products, is investing in improving and integrating supply chains and pharmaceutical management in order to expand product availability, reduce product waste and lower procurement and supply costs.

## Access to the Most Recent Medical Products and Technologies

Efficient procurement and supply chain systems are critical to uninterrupted and equitable health services. The Global Fund, with over 40 percent of its funding allocated towards medicines and other health products, is also investing in improving and integrating supply chains and pharmaceutical management in order to expand product availability, reduce product waste and lower procurement and supply costs. In 2019, as result of the Global Fund's investments, the availability of medicines exceeded targets for HIV and TB drugs for countries involved in the supply chain transformation initiative.<sup>14</sup>

8 [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate\\_2020resultsreport\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate_2020resultsreport_report_en.pdf)

9 [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/4759/core\\_resilientsustainablehealth\\_infonote\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/4759/core_resilientsustainablehealth_infonote_en.pdf)

10 <https://frontlineaids.org/our-work-includes/react/>

11 [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate\\_2020resultsreport\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/10103/corporate_2020resultsreport_report_en.pdf)

12 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60755-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60755-3/fulltext)

13 <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/updates/other-updates/2020-04-22-covid-19-response-monitoring-approach-and-information-collection/>

14 [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/1306/publication\\_countriesbuildresilientsustainablehealth\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/1306/publication_countriesbuildresilientsustainablehealth_report_en.pdf)

## Adequate Domestic Health Financing

The Global Fund's Sustainability, Transition and Co-Financing policy is focused on supporting countries as they move over time toward full domestic funding of their health systems, including their HIV, TB and malaria programs. Additionally, to stimulate domestic investments, the Global Fund includes an obligation for governments to commit domestic resources when obtaining a grant from the Global Fund (or else they will face cuts or possible stoppage of the grant), and this requirement has increased domestic investments in health systems by an additional \$8.9 billion between 2017 and 2019.<sup>15</sup> These policies advance a country's own buy-in and commitment to providing for health security that leaves no one behind. COVID-19 as an enormous health and economic challenge to lower income countries will likely undermine and slow domestic resource mobilization for a period of time. Donor assistance to low-income countries strapped as they confront COVID-19 will remain important. Yet progress toward more domestic financing is an important foundation for health systems, as the Global Fund facilitates.



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## Policy Recommendations

### **Expand investments in crucial elements of health systems to sustain service delivery in crisis times**

Flexibility and a nimble response are key to adapting in times of unexpected crises, and a strong health system allows for countries to mount a response. Without the capacity for flexible responses to crises, an overwhelmed health system will fail to sustain service delivery for other diseases. Both results-oriented and transparent, the Global Fund is a particularly vital catalyst for donors to invest in responsive health systems – incentivizing and leveraging domestic resource mobilization in the countries in question.

### **Leverage community-based interventions to empower locally-led responses**

Scaling up existing Global Fund grants for resilient health systems that prioritize the needs of local populations will enable effective infection prevention, communication and management of COVID-19. Decentralizing decision-making for health facility resource allocation to a locally-led response creates a voice for affected local populations as well as opportunities to mobilize the capacities of nonprofits as well.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, reinforcing health systems by prioritizing community-led responses ensures that treatments and vaccines are ready for distribution once made available.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/7019/publication\\_domesticfinancinghealth\\_focuson\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/7019/publication_domesticfinancinghealth_focuson_en.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9523/covid19\\_resilientsustainablehealthsystemsforhealth\\_infonote\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9523/covid19_resilientsustainablehealthsystemsforhealth_infonote_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/covid-19-plan/>



## **Prioritize training and support for human resources for healthcare**

Health workers are hardest hit during a disease outbreak, which may limit their ability to provide healthcare and service delivery during a crisis. Overcoming shortages to personal protective equipment (PPE), addressing [gender barriers](#) for female health professionals, providing incentives to continue working and expanding available training are critical to support health workers during a pandemic.<sup>18</sup> Training and long-term solution planning as regular features of health systems are critical to develop a well-equipped workforce prepared to rapidly respond to pandemics.<sup>19</sup>

## **Establish a stronger monitoring system to address gaps in pandemic preparedness**

Robust monitoring systems are essential to improve short-term pandemic responses and guide future responses. For example, with the COVID-19 crisis, tracking financing for different components of health systems will better determine what gaps need filling, whether that be protections for health care workers, medical technologies or other needs. Additionally, tracking health resourcing during crises like the coronavirus pandemic spotlights where resources for other critical disease responses and services are being redirected. A strong monitoring system will guide domestic and international funding to improve pandemic preparedness and health security.<sup>20</sup>

## **Support multilateral mechanisms ensuring equitable allocation of diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics**

Rather than reinventing the wheel, building on existing multilateral mechanisms with strong track records on delivery, innovation and equitable access, including the Global Fund and Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance), is critical to ensure equitable distribution of the latest medical technology and services.<sup>21</sup> A lack of global coordination and support for agile multilateral mechanisms could exacerbate inequalities in and between countries and diminish cooperation against future health security threats.<sup>22</sup> The United States' participation and support for such multilateral mechanisms will make them more effective and help marginalized populations in need. And among them, it should emphasize scaling up investment in those – like the Global Fund – most prepared to deliver measurable results, end epidemics, attend to human rights concerns, include civil society participation and build genuine health security.

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18 [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9523/covid19\\_resilientsustainablesystemsforhealth\\_infonote\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9523/covid19_resilientsustainablesystemsforhealth_infonote_en.pdf)

19 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559804/>

20 <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/strengthening-health-systems-during-a-pandemic-the-role-of-development-finance-f762bf1c/>

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21 [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9523/covid19\\_resilientsustainablesystemsforhealth\\_infonote\\_en.pdf](https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9523/covid19_resilientsustainablesystemsforhealth_infonote_en.pdf)

22 [https://www.cfr.org/report/pandemic-preparedness-lessons-COVID-19/pdf/TFR\\_Pandemic\\_Preparedness.pdf](https://www.cfr.org/report/pandemic-preparedness-lessons-COVID-19/pdf/TFR_Pandemic_Preparedness.pdf)

