

March 27, 2023

Ajay Banga

Nominee for President of the World Bank

Dear Mr. Banga,

Congratulations on your nomination to serve as World Bank President.

As a group of U.S. civil society organizations focused on global health, we believe the next President of the World Bank should prioritize the health inequities that sit at the intersection of major development crises of our time. The global public good of pandemic preparedness cannot and must not come at the expense of the community and country-led health delivery systems for existing pandemics.

The World Bank's record on health in low- and middle-income countries and addressing existing systemic inequities is mixed. There is an urgent need for the next President to learn from past missteps and emphasize evidence, focus on tangible measurements of impact, and reduce, rather than increase, country debt burden. This should include doubling down on the World Bank's focus on extreme poverty, not diluting that mission. The success or failure of the next World Bank President's tenure should be measured on their agenda for bold, creative, ambitious action to make a measurable impact in defeating the leading causes of preventable suffering and death in low- and middle-income countries today, and in ensuring the development of resilient systems to address future pandemics.

It is essential the World Bank demonstrates leadership to unlock significant additional resources to address the closely interconnected priorities of strengthened health systems, ending current epidemics such as AIDS, TB and malaria, and building capacity for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. This is essential to address deep inequities in the health delivery and outcomes laid bare by COVID-19.

These are five steps the next president of the World Bank should take:

- Unlock significant additional **resources to support stronger, more resilient community and country-led public sector health systems:** The Bank should make better use of existing resources, through innovative tools like loan buy-downs, trust funds like the Global Financing Facility, and strengthened partnership with other health partners like

the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria and UNAIDS. The Bank should also look for innovative ways to unlock more financing from its existing balance sheets through the ongoing MDB reform agenda. Given the precarious outlook on availability of IDA funding, unlocking additional resources, while considering debt sustainability is critical. The Bank is well positioned to make more health financing available to countries without drawing down on limited Official Development Assistance (ODA) that is often more effectively invested through other mechanisms.

- **Debt cancellation:** Countries must be released from the debt traps they are facing, which are directly undermining their ability to respond to pandemics of today and prepare for the pandemics of tomorrow. During the first half of 2020, the World Bank received six times more in debt repayment from the poorest countries in the world than they received in disbursed COVID-19 emergency funding. Under David Malpass' tenure, the Bank refused to participate in a sorely needed program to suspend debt servicing. Dropping debts provides the desperately needed fiscal space countries need to prioritize pandemic response, prevention and preparedness.
- **Prioritizing the World Bank's existing twin goals:** The new Evolution Roadmap risks diluting focus from the World Bank's existing goals: eradicating poverty and equitable shared prosperity. Without a specific focus on equity, the benefits of investment would tend to accrue to relatively wealthy, privileged populations. The next World Bank President should maintain the firm commitment to end extreme poverty and to prioritizing the bottom 40% of income earners across all elements of its work, including pandemics while positioning itself to better address other emerging threats.
- **Accountability:** Malpass led the World Bank through a surge in COVID health spending widely criticized for its lack of transparency. The World Bank reform agenda should deliver increased accountability to communities most impacted by pandemics, increasing meaningful opportunities for civil society and community engagement, oversight, and decision-making. Accountability measures could include streamlining legal agreements, reducing conditionalities and streamlining safeguards, addressing the imbalance of governance and African representation and addressing questions on absorption capacity.
- **Assess and adapt the Pandemic Fund to respond to country demand:** Under its first call for proposals, more than 100 low- and middle-income countries put in early bids for at least \$5.5 billion from the Pandemic Fund that only has \$300 million to invest. This is a clear signal of demand from the World Bank clients for investment in pandemic

preparedness. But the Pandemic Fund has yet to show how it will prioritize the kind of community- and country-level health system investments that can stop the pandemics of today and of the future. It also doesn't have a clear strategy for sustainable financing that goes well beyond ODA. The next leader must ensure that the Pandemic Fund prioritizes preparedness and health systems, with inclusive governance and evidence-backed modalities.

Finally, we invite you to respond to this call to action with your agenda for people-centered results on global pandemics. Please contact Chris Collins (ccollins@theglobalfight.org) at Friends of the Global Fight with any response to our letter.

Sincerely,

The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
The Americas TB Coalition
amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research
AVAC
Children's AIDS Fund International
Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
Health GAP (Global Access Project)
HEPS Uganda
House Works Inc.
Management Sciences for Health
ONE
RESULTS
Treatment Action Group

Cc: The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, President of the United States of America
The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary of the Treasury
The Honorable Tony Blinken, Secretary of State