

Note for the Record

ACT-A Tracking and Accelerating Progress (TAP) Working Group Civil Society Organization (CSO) Roundtable

Virtual meeting, 12 September, 13.30-15.00 CEST

Primary objectives

1. Critically appraise the lessons learned and challenges with achieving COVID-19 targets for vaccines, tests, treatments and PPE, from the perspective of community health and health system end-users.
2. Identify actions needed to address bottlenecks to ACT-A pillar priorities, including for vaccination, diagnostics and introduction of new and existing therapies for COVID-19.
3. Identify key practices in engagement with civil society and community health organizations to increase access to COVID-19 tools and how these stakeholders can be further activated to accelerate access to COVID-19 tools during the ACT-A transition period.
4. Provide inputs on key messages for high level advocacy in global forums, including for TAP WG reports.

I. Opening remarks by TAP Co-Chairs

- Loyce Pace, Assistant Secretary for Global Affairs at Department of Health and Human Services, USA & Tri Tharyat, Director-General for Multilateral Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia opened the meeting.
- Almost two and half years into the COVID-19 pandemic, much progress has been made to control the impact of the disease. Although some countries are no longer facing an acute crisis, the pandemic is far from over, with high levels of circulating virus in many regions and people are still getting sick and dying from the disease.
- It was noted that the ACT-A partnership is transitioning, but is not over, and its work will continue for the foreseeable future to address inequitable access to COVID-19 tools.
- They reflected on the critical role of CSOs and communities have played and continue to play COVID-19 response, especially by shining light on remaining gaps and needs. They noted the need to collectively work towards meeting the global COVID-19 targets.

II. Welcome by moderators

- Dr Ayoade Alakija, WHO Special Envoy for the ACT-Accelerator & Katy Kydd Wright, Director, Global Fund Advocates Network (GFAN) moderators for the meeting welcomed participants.

III. The value & need for communities & CSOs engagement in the ACT-A transition

- Marijke Wijnroks, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive Director, Global Fund, shared how CSOs and communities impacted by HIV, TB and malaria have been at the heart of the work of the Global Fund from its inception. Since those early days communities and civil society have played an active role at every level of Global Fund operation, from policy development to implementation and oversight. She explained how they worked together and how their involvement has been vital to sustainable change.
- The global health community which are turning to look at how to structure future pandemic preparedness and response architecture should seize the opportunity to meaningfully engaged communities and civil society from the very beginning, listening, and learning.

- The ACT-A Civil Society Platform have been active participants in the ACT-A Facilitation Council and its working groups, ensuring decisions take into consideration the voices and needs of the communities.
- Civil society and community engagement has been seen and heard through COVAX, the Global Fund's C19RM and Unitaid and FIND's test and treat project, just to mention a few.

IV. **Update on the status of the rollout of COVID-19 tools**

- Lucy Boulanger, Health Systems Response Connector, WHO, provided a live demonstration of the Global COVID-19 Access Tracker (<https://www.covid19globaltracker.org/>).
- It provides visualizations of indicators which measure progress of achieving global targets, covering vaccines, testing, therapeutics and PPE. It can be used to assess what the bottlenecks are in the rollout of tools and these can be addressed to increase access.
- Data sources are noted on each of the areas of the tracker. However, it was noted that lack of data is a challenge for reporting on some of the targets, particularly therapeutics and health workers.

V. **Roundtable: Accelerating the rollout of COVID-19 tools & crucial role of CSO and community engagement**

- CSOs, Community, ACT-A agency and ACT-A Facilitation Council member representatives took to the floor to address the guiding questions and also provided written input. Below is a summary of the key points made:

- **Guiding question: What urgent actions from government, CSOs and global partners are needed to accelerate progress in the rollout of COVID-19 tools?**
 - **Integration:** Include CSOs into all facets of the response
 - **Funding:** fund community-led initiatives and interventions and incorporate them within broader systems for designing and decision-making around COVID (and other health) responses
 - **Community mobilization:** engage community actors to raise awareness and encourage, specifically vulnerable groups, to follow guidance
 - **Fund community-led interventions:** Health systems cannot and should not be relying on volunteers without appropriate trainings or protections.
 - **Data:** timely, nuanced and formatted data needed to help decision making
 - **Demand:** strengthen demand for tools
 - **Primary health care systems:** build stronger systems as they are key to the response and PPR
 - **Engage local governments** and strengthen engagement of local CSO networks
- **Guiding question: What are the main barriers for access and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, treatments and PPE, in your country/context? How can they be addressed to accelerate uptake?**
 - Barriers
 - Lack of political will
 - Level of trust with government
 - COVID-19 conspiracies
 - COVID-19 fatigue
 - Lack of incentives for governments or industry to behave differently
 - COVID-19 tools are expensive, especially tests and treatments
 - Lack of resources
 - Government resistance to include of CSOs in the response
 - Centralized supply chain
 - Legal liability and indemnification of new tools which are being pushed down to purchasers and implementers which is hampering rollout

- What were the major health systems gaps your community encountered in accessing and delivering COVID-19 countermeasures (vaccines, tests, treatments and PPE)? How can these be addressed to increase uptake of these tools?

Major health systems gaps

- Mistrust between the health system personnel and the clients,
- Competing health issues
- Lack of engagement of CSOs in delivery of countermeasures by government
- People living with long COVID were not brought into the response.
- Many governments forced people with long Covid into prolonged isolation under poor conditions.
- Failure to address the myths & misconceptions that came with the vaccines and COVID-19 in general.
- Lack of clarity for much of the pandemic - slow information uptake and download from communities, national and global levels.
- Health provider burnout/mortality and morbidity
- Testing, including self testing was available only in certain high income countries.

How they can be addressed

- More awareness and sharing of data from ministries of health
- Develop a plan to respond to emergencies like COVID-19
- Support the service delivery (human resources and materials) and provide free health services
- Address misinformation promptly
- Ensure testing is affordable
- Early detection and response to disease outbreaks
- Roll out community based testing including self testing.
- Link testing to treatment more strongly

Incentive rather than punish people who self report their test results

VI. Concluding remarks

- The moderators summarized that they had heard clearly at this meeting that the COVID-19 pandemic isn't over and there is still much to be done to address the inequity in the rollout of COVID-19 tools. The feedback from this session will be shared with ACT-A partners as they plan for the next steps for the partnership.