Reimagining Commitment to Fighting HIV, TB and Malaria During COVID-19: Focus on the Private Sector

Summary Report
Key Themes from Webinar Discussion on 16 July 2020
Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the world in unprecedented ways, with serious implications for global public health programs. COVID-19 threatens our collective progress towards the eradication of HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria. Much of the disease burden for COVID-19 is borne by the most vulnerable in our society, the same communities that carry the highest burden of HIV, TB and malaria.

Severe disruptions to routine healthcare services due to lockdowns, diversion of healthcare workforce to the COVID-19 response, and disruption of travel and supply chains have an immediate impact on our collective ability to prevent, diagnose and treat these three infectious diseases. A recent report from the Global Fund found that COVID-19 could cause deaths from the three diseases to nearly double over the course of the next 12 months unless immediate steps are taken.

The private sector has been an indispensable advocate, partner and stakeholder in addressing these epidemics. Businesses are instrumental in addressing COVID-19 in a myriad of ways, including raising funds and supporting national responses, investing directly in primary healthcare, taking critical steps to protect their employees and communities, and leveraging their capabilities in communications, manufacturing and supply of health products – including innovation in new treatments and vaccines – to address the pandemic.

Given our nearly two decades of work on these communicable diseases, we believe it is important to draw attention to the escalating issues around prevention and treatment, and to highlight the work that is being done by the private sector through cross-sector partnerships to help mitigate increasing risks. We recently hosted a webinar titled Reimagining Commitment to Fighting HIV, TB and Malaria During COVID-19: Focus on the Private Sector. Through this discussion, we:

- Examined the impacts of COVID-19 on malaria, HIV and TB interventions, and possible mitigation strategies to protect hard-won gains.
- Shared examples of how businesses are addressing malaria, HIV, TB and COVID-19 in their workplaces, communities and beyond – addressing both risks and opportunities.
- Deliberated on ways that companies could harness their core business strategy, communications, innovation and philanthropy, to respond to the increases in malaria, HIV and TB cases.

Our keynote speakers were Peter Sands, Executive Director of the Global Fund, and the Honorable Minister Dr. Lia Tadesse Gebremedhin, the Minister of Health of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, who reinforced the link between the health of populations and the health of economies, and the important contribution of the private sector in delivering on both.

A panel followed, with leaders from EANNASO, a network of community-based organizations in Eastern Africa, and six multinational and regional companies (Access Bank, Aliko Dangote Foundation, BD, Chevron, Merck and Orange).
Introduction

During the panel, speakers shared their experience, concerns and optimism for the potential impact across sectors and borders, and the importance of both science and collaboration coming together to address the critical issues that we are facing today.

Eight important themes surfaced during the discussion which we will address in this report:

1. The private sector is committed to protecting their workforce and the communities where they live and work.
2. The private sector is agile and adaptive, but more engagement is needed for a sustained response.
3. Continuity of ongoing health services and programming is essential during COVID-19.
4. The local private sector is stepping up its commitment to address local health challenges.
5. There is a strong business case for private sector engagement in health.
6. Any response must be sustainable long-term and aim to contribute to stronger health systems.
7. Civil society and communities are needed at every level of the response.
8. Partnerships and collaboration are critical to curbing the HIV, TB, malaria crises, and now the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 170 participants from the private sector, international NGOs, academia, government ministries and communities participated in the session. Through this report, we strive to capture the essence of the dialogue, with concrete examples of what the private sector can do to help stem further consequences of the pandemic on hard won gains in HIV, TB and malaria. We hope to encourage those who are committed to stay the course. We hope to encourage those not yet engaged to understand the need, the opportunities and the unbearable cost of inaction.

This is just the beginning and we look forward to continuing our work together.
Keynotes

An opening discussion with our keynote speakers was moderated by Sherwin Charles, CEO and Co-founder of Goodbye Malaria. Highlights are below, with additional details and references from their comments captured within the Key Themes section that follows. GBCHealth has also published an accompanying Q&A with both Mr. Sands and Minister Tadesse.

We have an incredible amount at stake right now. Both in terms of the lives that could be lost to COVID-19 itself, but also the lives that could be lost because of the knock-on impact on other diseases. It’s not just HIV, TB and malaria, it’s also maternal health, immunization and so much more. Analyses from groups like UNAIDS, WHO, Stop TB and others estimate that we could see another half a million deaths from HIV/AIDS, another half a million deaths from TB, and malaria deaths could double in the next year due to the pandemic. On TB and HIV, we could lose a decade worth of gains, and for malaria we could slip back to the death rate at the millennium, two decades ago. That is not an outcome that any of us are going to let happen. I am determined and confident we can avoid that. The question is, how much can we mitigate the negative impact?

The Global Fund was created to fight three of the deadliest diseases: AIDS, TB and malaria. It has the infrastructure, relationships, and expertise working with governments, communities and the private sector to leverage our capabilities to combat COVID-19. People underestimate how much the COVID-19 response in many countries is leveraging the infrastructure that has been put in place to fight other diseases. The Fund was able to move rapidly right at the beginning of March, providing countries with grant flexibilities and creating the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM).

The Fund has seen our private sector partners respond very quickly and constructively to the challenge of COVID-19. However, more corporate engagement is needed, and it needs to be sustainable. The private sector has underestimated what is at risk with infectious diseases. If there was ever a lesson as to what is at stake - the disruption to business and the economy - COVID-19 is that lesson. I hope that when we make it through this pandemic, we remember that there is a very powerful link between the health of the population and its ability to generate wealth.

Business has a lot at stake in making societies healthier. My message to companies already engaged in health issues is that you must convert the rest of the business community, because the business community as a whole does not engage in health as much as it should. I think COVID-19 could transform the relationship between the business community and health to a much broader engagement than we have achieved thus far.
Keynotes

Ethiopia activated its public health emergency response at the end of January, opening the national Emergency Operations Center, introducing screenings at all borders, and preparing facilities for an influx of COVID-19 cases.

As soon as the first case was detected in mid-March, a multi-sectoral response was initiated, and the Prime Minister set up a national Ministerial committee to lead and coordinate the government responses. Urgent non-pharmaceutical interventions were also swiftly instituted, such as school closures and a ban on big public gatherings.

Collaboration with different partners was one of the key factors that helped Ethiopia in its response to COVID-19. The role of development partners is clear, as they helped mobilize resources and allowed us to reprogram funds to focus on COVID-19.

There has been a lot of support from the development partners, specifically the Global Fund, Gavi, the World Bank and others. There was also a strong response from the community itself, who donated spaces for treatment and isolation centers and provided financial support and commodities.

The private sector has also played an important role. For example, Ethio telecom pushed out important health messages and reminders about COVID-19. The media and entertainment industry also disseminated important public health messages. We partnered with the private health sector to leverage their capacity within the COVID-19 strategy.

Overall, the private sector came together to help the government’s response by providing expertise, and even setting up an advisory council that supported these interventions. To assist local businesses, the government provided tax exemptions for those companies directly engaged with COVID-19 support.

This pandemic has taken a toll on the economy in different ways. We need to work in partnership to address COVID-19, but also to maintain the economy. We have been working with the private sector around sustainability of essential services and local manufacturing, but we know that we still need to grow that engagement to best support the health system.
Key Themes

Private sector representatives from Access Bank, Aliko Dangote Foundation, BD, Chevron, Merck, Orange, and EANASO, a network of community-based organizations in Eastern Africa, participated in a panel discussion on the impacts of COVID-19 on malaria, HIV and TB, and how the private sector, and their companies, are addressing this. Through comments and conversation, the following eight themes emerged.

1. The private sector is committed to protecting their workforce and the communities where they live and work.

First and foremost, companies are committed to taking every precaution to help ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of their employees, employees’ families, and the communities where they live and operate. All panelists agreed that prioritizing employees’ wellbeing was critically important during this crisis.

For Chevron, this meant altering its practices to increase access to medical services for employees, adding more doctors and nurses, emphasizing telehealth, and increasing supplies of PPE and medications. Chevron also focused on high-risk employees, introducing flexible work schedules, home deliveries of medications, individual assessments and screenings, and adding processes to confidentially address health risks and concerns.

Critically important is that all these changes were introduced while maintaining ongoing HIV, TB and malaria services. Specifically, in Nigeria, Chevron not only continued with HIV, TB and malaria services, but added home visits and simplified deliveries of medications. In some of their facilities across the globe, Chevron also changed their production capabilities to make PPE and hand sanitizer to respond to the pandemic.

“Let us not forget that there is a life behind every statistic, every story and every metric.”
Michael Steinberg, Team Lead, Global Public Health & Special Projects, Chevron Corporation

2. The private sector is agile and adaptive, but more engagement is needed for a sustained response.

The private sector is well positioned to respond quickly and efficiently to the rapidly evolving situation around COVID-19. Peter Sands, Executive Director of the Global Fund, emphasized that the private sector can be a source of expertise in tackling the current crisis and the three diseases. The private sector can provide the necessary online tools and training to assist with digital health and develop new tools to prevent, diagnose and treat diseases.

For example, BD made virtual trainings available to partners in countries where BD employees could not go in-person to ensure continued access to and proper use of TB diagnostics tools.
Orange was able to quickly adapt their mHealth platform that was previously focused on HIV, TB and malaria to also include COVID-19 and the re-designed tool will be first rolled out in partnership with the Global Fund in Cote d’Ivoire. New features center around patient awareness, such as COVID-19-related messaging on social distancing and other protective measures; patient follow-up, monitoring and mobility tracing; and medical record creation and management.

The platform also has analytical capabilities to support healthcare workers’ decision-making to continuously improve the quality of care provided to patients. Orange expects that 50 million notifications will be sent to patients per year using this platform.

Production of urgently needed commodities, such as PPE, and expertise in logistics and supply chain management to deliver these commodities are other areas where the private sector should be able to quickly play a valuable role. Mr. Sands noted that Global Fund’s private sector partners responded quickly and constructively to the COVID-19 challenge. However, more corporate engagement was required to win the fight against the three diseases and COVID-19.

“The importance of technology is more critical than ever, the pandemic is putting more pressure on the health system and underscores the need to accelerate the deployment, roll out of all relevant current solutions and the new solutions.”

Elisabeth Medou Badang, Senior Vice President Africa and Indian Ocean and Spokesperson for Orange Middle East & Africa, Orange

3. **Continuity of ongoing health services and programming is essential during COVID-19.**

Companies across industries are working to sustain existing programs and interventions, while also adapting those to reflect new needs. Healthcare companies like BD and Merck immediately responded to the increased demand for their products, and increased production for products used in hospitals. They are also working to ensure that health products are accessible and affordable to governments and health systems globally in the future. To be successful at bringing breakthrough innovations to those that need them globally, we will need a multi-sector response with funding from governments and donors.

For Access Bank, that means maintaining their commitment to HIV and malaria throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Both diseases remain significant public health challenges and continue to outpace COVID-19 infections in Nigeria. Access Bank’s approach was to integrate the COVID-19 response within its wider ongoing programming on HIV and malaria.

They also prioritized advocacy and collaborated with CAMA to host a webinar around World Malaria Day that emphasized the importance of maintaining a focus on malaria in the midst of COVID-19. The webinar was broadcast to a wide array of stakeholders who were able to use the lessons learned to help continue their own programming.
Key Themes

When the first COVID-19 case was reported in Ethiopia, the Ministry of Health noticed that there was a significant drop in outpatient visits and in-patient emergency visits across the country. Realizing this was in part due to fear in the community of contracting COVID-19, the government quickly adjusted its response to include continuity of essential services as one of its key components. They designated some of the facilities as COVID-19-only, while others were for non-COVID-19 cases but included isolation rooms in case these were needed.

Proactive public awareness messaging to communicate that the government was working to make health facilities safe for patients to visit for their treatment was a critical component to the success of Ethiopia’s response. They continued to implement bi-weekly reviews of the pandemic strategy to ensure it remained agile and responded to the changing situation.

“We cannot afford to ignore malaria and HIV amid COVID-19. We can’t ‘rob Peter to pay Paul’ – we need to stay committed to addressing existing health issues which includes malaria and HIV.”

Omobolanle Victor-Laniyan, Head, Sustainability, Access Bank

4. The local private sector is stepping up its commitment to addressing local health challenges.

Given the economic distress that COVID-19 has caused, some donors have pulled back funding and have subsequently created a gap in health services and funding. In Nigeria, local corporations and philanthropists, such as Access Bank and Aliko Dangote Foundation, joined efforts and resources to form the Coalition Against COVID (CACOVID). The group aims to support existing healthcare centers across the nation, but also to set up additional testing facilities and treatment centers, get private labs involved in testing to speed up the process, and use their reach to raise awareness about the pandemic.

In the case of Ethiopia, Dr. Tadesse explained that the government is working closely with local manufacturers to shift their capacity to produce PPE and hand sanitizers, with discussions also underway for production of local COVID-19 test kits. Local manufacturing not only ensures the availability of supplies, but also supports local businesses during the crisis.

“COVID-19 has made it clear that there’s limited help coming from outside, there’s no blueprint, so each country is doing its own take on lockdown measures, and funding is scarce. This is why the private sector response is key.”

Zouera Youssoufou, Managing Director and CEO, Aliko Dangote Foundation
5. **There is a strong business case for private sector engagement in health.**

Healthy people contribute to healthy economies. The immediate economic impact of COVID-19 demonstrates the extent of the link between health and socioeconomic prosperity. Efforts by business to fight COVID-19 and the three diseases are investments in the long-term health and welfare of our societies.

Acknowledging the clear link between health and wealth of a population, the Global Fund’s Peter Sands emphasized that the slow economic impact and opportunities lost due to the three diseases are often invisible, unlike the immediate impact of COVID-19. For example, many countries could have a thriving tourism industry, creating a lot of employment and wealth. However, because these countries have high burdens of malaria, it is extremely difficult to build a tourism industry. The opportunity cost in this case presents a compelling business proposition to get rid of malaria. Eliminating the three diseases would take a huge burden off the continent, with an enormous health and economic impact.

6. **Any response must be sustainable long-term and aim to contribute to stronger health systems.**

The actions taken by the private sector must focus on building capacity, training, access and infrastructure. COVID-19 will not be the last pandemic the world faces, and any private sector initiative must consider its sustainability beyond the current crisis, including how it will impact the communities where the company operates and whether the systems they create can be maintained and utilized in future crises.

In Angola, Chevron shipped supplies, built a local ICU, and provided extensive virtual support, emphasizing that the response cannot just be throwing money at an issue, but providing the larger infrastructure and continued support so that the problem can be adequately addressed. Mr. Sands also challenged private sector partners to consider and commit to a sustained corporate investment in health, which is required to win the fight against the three diseases and COVID-19.

“The three diseases have shown us ways to come together and work in harmony by listening to the voice of communities, mobilizing resources at multiple levels, making medicines and testing accessible, and strengthening health systems. We should leverage and activate these mechanisms to address global pandemics.”

Renuka Gadde, Vice President, Global Health, BD
Key Themes

7. Civil society and communities are needed at every level of the response.

Civil society organizations have an intimate understanding of their communities and how they respond to crises, giving them the tools to react quickly. In the case of COVID-19, civil society organizations provided essential services to their communities, including nutrition, shelter, and other safeguards for individuals impacted by the three diseases to ensure that they continued receiving their treatments. In times of crisis, community-based monitoring is also needed to hold government and other stakeholders accountable.

Civil society is innovative and can adapt quickly to crises, as evidenced by the way EANNASO developed an app that tracks COVID-19 infections – a resource that may be adapted to countries across the region. There are opportunities for collaboration with the private sector in developing these new tools to respond to the crisis. More broadly, COVID-19 requires a multi-sector approach that builds on partnership with the civil society in order to integrate a community-led response into the health system. The response cannot just rely on external funding but must harness domestic resources to ensure buy-in and sustainability.

“Civil Society and communities should be given space to be part of the global health response so we can build community systems as we build resilient and sustainable systems for health.”

Olive Mumba, Executive Director, EANNASO

8. Partnerships and collaboration are critical to curbing the HIV, TB, malaria crises, and now the COVID-19 pandemic.

Companies are working across industries in collaboration with stakeholders from all sectors and through global partnerships to ensure that new technologies are accessible and affordable for all countries. Drawing on its experience with HIV and Ebola, Merck knows that both science and collaboration are essential, both in developing medicines during a public health emergency and in getting these medicines and vaccines to those that can benefit from them. Through collaboration, partners can more quickly understand the virus.

This pandemic underscores the urgent need for investment in scientific research in public health threats, including in antimicrobial resistance. COVID-19 has reinforced the need for a multi-sector response to address funding gaps, health systems strengthening, and implementation challenges that are critical to making these scientific advancements available globally.

Merck is working with the US National Institutes of Health, the Gates Foundation and other partners globally to ensure that their products are accessible and affordable to governments and health systems across the globe. Merck is also supporting patients, healthcare providers, and communities through direct relief efforts and has contributed more than USD 3 million thus far to COVID-19 relief.
Key Themes

Chevron, BD, Orange and others on the panel reinforced that partnerships were critical to winning the fight against global health challenges, including the current pandemic. Chevron highlighted their long-standing partnerships with the Global Fund, Friends of the Global Fight and GBCHealth to curb HIV/AIDS, and with the Corporate Alliance on Malaria in Africa (CAMA) to address malaria in the regions where they operate.

BD noted its ongoing collaboration with the US CDC, PEPFAR, USAID, Africa CDC and others on HIV and TB. BD is also creating new partnerships, including one with the University of Michigan to develop online resources to facilitate virtual trainings on how to properly use their diagnostics equipment.

Partnerships with public and private stakeholders are also key to Orange’s approach to leveraging its assets to improve access to and quality of essential services, including healthcare services, as a leader within the African digital transformation.

Peter Sands reinforced that the Global Fund was founded as one of the first public-private partnerships and this model of cross-sector collaboration had to be the driving force in the response to contain COVID-19 and other infectious diseases – HIV, TB and malaria.

“One thing that we have learned from HIV, is that no company and no sector can do this alone. To be successful at bringing breakthrough innovations to those that need them globally, we would need a multisectoral response with funding from governments and donors.”

Paul Schaper, Executive Director, Global Health Policy, Merck & Co., Inc.
GBHealth serves as a hub for business engagement on the world’s most pressing health challenges. We have a strong track record of catalyzing private sector investments and partnerships, designing platforms to build knowledge and multi-stakeholder collaboration, and creating tools to support companies’ ability to improve health and wellness in the workplace, in communities and collectively at a national, regional or global level. Drawing on our network of hundreds of companies and partners, GBHealth drives progress in the areas of greatest need including malaria; HIV/AIDS; TB; sexual and reproductive health rights; maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health; nutrition; and NCDs. It is in these areas where we believe the assets of the business community can have maximum impact as we work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). GBHealth continues to inspire business to leverage its power and resources to transform the health of society in innovative ways.

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CAMA, a GBHealth-led coalition of companies with business interests in Africa, brings the collective force and voice of the private sector to drive improved malaria outcomes in Africa. CAMA provides a dedicated platform for corporations to share best practices, create new partnerships and gain visibility for malaria control efforts across the African continent. CAMA companies both lead and support malaria prevention, control and treatment activities and collectively deploy millions of dollars to programs that serve the needs of malaria-affected people and communities.

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The PSC is a group of companies committed to shaping the strategy of the leading funding agency in global health by representing the private sector constituency on the Board of the Global Fund. The Global Fund is one of the most efficient avenues for business investment in ending the epidemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. GBHealth provides an entry-point for private sector collaboration with the Global Fund, working with dozens of businesses who bring their expertise, assets and networks to the Global Fund.

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With thanks to our speakers: