

Communities Delegation at the 39th Executive Board of Unitaid

20 January 2022

The Communities Delegation to the Unitaid Board, representing people living with the diseases, actively participated in the Executive Board of Unitaid at its semi-annual meeting held virtually, on 15 and 16 December 2021. The Communities Delegation was represented by the Board members, liaison officer and five delegation members. Prior to the EB39 meeting, the Delegation held pre-meetings to discuss the board meeting agenda and support the interventions of the Communities Board members to represent the voices and concerns of the communities at grass root level.

This brief report summarises the key issues discussed at the Board meeting, the Communities Delegation's positions, and the resulting outcomes and decisions.

Strategic Framework development

During the two-day session, the Board agreed on a Strategic Framework for Unitaid's new strategy for 2022-26, providing the Secretariat with clear guidance and feedback to elaborate the narrative and a transformative strategic plan for final approval at the Board meeting in June 2022. The current strategic framework is not formally approved but will serve as a starting point for the completion of the Strategic Plan development during the first half of 2022 as Unitaid enters the last phase of developing its new strategic plan for the next five years.

There was broad consensus among the Board to maintain the prioritisation of the three core diseases of Unitaid's mandate (HIV, TB and malaria) and co-infections such as hepatitis C, as well as child and maternal health, as the core focus of Unitaid's new strategy for 2022-26. The delegation emphasised that new areas of work such as COVID-19, future global health emergencies and neglected diseases should only be taken on if additional new funding became available, in order not to jeopardise the progress achieved in the core diseases. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Unitaid has managed to adapt and evolve, demonstrating the relevance of its model and how its niche expertise complements the work of other key global health players in delivering effective solutions. However, COVID-19 continues to disrupt the HIV, TB and malaria interventions whilst the global response to the three epidemics has veered off-track since the beginning of the pandemic.

EB39 provided an opportunity for the Board to discuss five aspects of the Strategic Plan - the Vision, Mission, Strategic Objectives, Principles, and Unitaid's orientation towards pandemic preparedness and response. Communities successfully advocated for the inclusion of more precise language on equity in the Mission/Vision statements to reinforce that the innovative health products supported by Unitaid's investments must effectively reach the populations that most need them. Too often, vulnerable populations are left out of country responses because they are criminalised or migrants. During the discussion on the Strategic Objectives, the delegation intervened to improve language relating to partnerships and the centrality of communities, to maximise the engagement with affected communities and responsiveness to their needs.

During the discussion on the Programmatic Priorities, several delegations brought up concerns around the omission of TB treatment as a programmatic priority in the current draft. The Communities Board member stressed the need to approach the TB response holistically and to not pit TB prevention, diagnostics and treatment against each other. The delegation further reiterated the need to keep HIV, TB and malaria at the centre of Unitaid's mandate and to ensure that women's and children's health interventions were situated within the response to the three diseases and not considered as a stand-alone area of investment.

Resource mobilization

The Board approved the plan presented by the Secretariat for resource mobilization with a target of raising, between 2022 and 2026, between \$1.25 and 1.35 billion USD, with \$275.0 M forecasted from new donors. The Board encouraged a close collaboration with the Global Fund Secretariat during the respective 2022 replenishment processes which should be complimentary since the impact results from both global health institutions depend on Unitaids interventions such as the introduction of dolutegravir, GeneXpert, HIV self-testing and TB pediatric formulations.

The delegation has long advocated for increased Community engagement in Unitaids resource mobilization efforts towards new and existing donors by engaging the voices of the beneficiaries of Unitaids interventions. The delegation therefor welcomed the new approach of bringing the human stories to donors by demonstrating the impact of how lives have been affected and saved but also suggested that this community engagement must be funded to be sustainable and involve a broad platform of community voices and not be limited to a few individuals. Unitaids needs to mobilise communities on the ground and better communicate the interventions that it implements in the countries because country implementers often do not give due visibility and acknowledgement to Unitaids.

Governance updates and Delegation Leadership transition

Key governance decisions taken at the 39th Board Meeting included the approval of the 2022 Operating Budget in the amount of US\$ 30.9 million, which is a 3% increase over the 2021 budget, largely due to Secretariat staff costs and an increased workload due to the COVID-19 grants. Communities raised concerns over secretariat staff wellbeing and burn-out as well as the headcount cap of secretariat staff. The Board agreed that the 2022 budget should be taken as an exceptional case due to the additional work because of Covid-19.

The Executive Board re-elected Marisol Touraine as Board Chair for a further two-year term until June 2024. Ms Touraine is a former French Minister of Social Affairs, Health and Women's Rights and has served as chair of the Unitaids Executive Board since June 2019.

The extension of the Chairs of the Policy and Strategy Committee (PSC) and the Finance and Accountability Committee (FAC) and its member composition was approved until June 2022. The Communities Delegation maintains its Observer status on the PSC and remains an active member of the FAC and the Governance Working Group (GWG). Discussions on governance and Board evolution will continue in 2022 in the GWG, especially on how to share donor seats and on criteria for new donor and implementing countries seats.

At the opening of EB39, the Board Chair welcomed the appointments [see [announcement HERE](#)] of Ms Maurine Murenga as the new Board Member, and Mr César Mufanequiço as the Alternate Board Member representing Communities living with the diseases. Both started their two-year terms at the end of the EB39 Board meeting and will serve as the new leadership of the Communities Delegation on the Unitaids Board until 31st December 2023.

The Delegation took the opportunity to express its gratitude and appreciation to out-going Board Member Mr Kenly Sikwese for his exceptional leadership during his tenure as Board Member of the Communities Delegation from 2018 until 2021. Several Board members, including the Chair and the Executive Director on behalf of the Secretariat thanked Kenly for his commitment to ensuring the needs of communities at the centre of the global health response.



Photo: Communities Board members Kenly Sikwese, Maurine Murenga and César Mufanequiço, joined by Delegation members Louis Da Gama and Abdul-Fatawu Salifu during the EB39 debriefing.

The next Executive Board meeting will take place on 15-16 June 2022.

The Communities Delegation to the Unitaid Board represents people living with and affected by HIV, TB and Malaria and those co-infected with HIV and HCV. The Communities Delegation has the goal of representing the views, voices, needs and interests of Communities living with the Diseases at Unitaid Board and Committee level. It aims to be transparent, accountable and to prepare communities to engage in Unitaid's work areas that directly affect those living with the diseases at grassroots and country level, especially in the global south. The Communities Delegation to the Unitaid Board is hosted by the Cape Town office of the Global Network of People living with HIV (GNP+). For more information, please contact Wim Vandeveld, Liaison Officer, Communities Delegation, wvandeveld@gnpplus.net