



Communities

Bringing Community Voices to Health Innovations

Communities Delegation at the 44th Executive Board of Unitaid

The Communities Delegation to the Unitaid Board, representing people living with the diseases, actively participated in the 44th Executive Board (EB44) session on June 18-19, 2024, in Geneva, Switzerland. The Board member a.i., the Alternate Board member a.i., two Delegation members and the Liaison Officer represented the Communities Delegation. They held pre-meetings to discuss the agenda topics and support the Board members' interventions, ensuring the grassroots voices and concerns were represented.

Board Retreat

A Board Retreat preceded the EB44, beginning with a candlelight memorial for John Rock, the long-time delegation's Advisory Working Group member who passed away in May, and for all who died from malaria, TB, and AIDS-related illnesses due to lack of access to life-saving treatment. The Board Chair committed to holding a moment of silence and lighting of a candle at the start of future Unitaid Board meetings.

The informal one-day Retreat brought together all Board constituencies to examine Unitaid's current operating model and discuss the extent to which the existing model enables the Board to exercise its strategic steering role and the right level of supervision and oversight while allowing for Unitaid's responsiveness. During the discussions on the operating model's ability to engage with partners and meet country needs, Communities presented the Delegation's proposal on Country Platforms for Community Engagement, Demand Creation, and Resource Mobilization. The proposal was well received and supported by several Board constituencies, with no objections voiced. The Chair's Retreat Summary references the proposal for further development. The next steps of the concept paper will be finalized with the Committees and Secretariat leadership by early September.

EB44 Executive Board meeting

This brief report summarizes the key issues, the Communities Delegation's positions, and the resulting outcomes and decisions from the EB44 Board meeting.

Performance Reporting

The Executive Director presented an overview of the 2023-2027 strategy's progress, current challenges, and opportunities as Unitaid accelerates the introduction and equitable adoption of key health products. He highlighted initiatives such as the Climate and Health strategy, which aims to mitigate the impact of climate change on health sector work and curbs environmental impact of Unitaid's work, and the recent Industry Engagement Forum in Lagos, Nigeria, which attracted over 300 participants to facilitate investment opportunities for expanding local pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity in Africa. The ED expressed confidence that the strategy

implementation was on track as data showed more than 100 countries are procuring and providing access to Unitaid-supported products, reaching approximately 300 million people, including 49 million children, each year—double the number from four years ago. The ED acknowledged the powerful role of civil society as critical members of Unitaid’s Board and recognized that communities, as direct beneficiaries, are the best advocates for Unitaid.

The Communities delegation commended the progress in the Executive Director's Report and specifically welcomed the increased focus on Community and Civil Society Engagement within Unitaid projects but cautioned that while 75% of the programmatic priorities had strong or good engagement, up from 40% the previous year, this area still needed significant strengthening. The delegation called for setting aside a dedicated percentage of Unitaid project funds for community engagement with cross-cutting support for community mobilization under HIV, coinfections, and comorbidities projects.

The delegation also raised concerns about the growing number of reported adverse effects of dolutegravir (DTG), especially among women living with HIV, and demanded more studies to ascertain the prevalence and mitigation of side effects like diabetes, weight gain, and hypertension. The increased attention is needed to safeguard the reputation of DTG since 24 million people are estimated to be on generic DTG-based regimens—over 80% of all people on ART worldwide.

EB44 provided an opportunity for the Board to discuss the Secretariat's reports on the strategic and organizational **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs), the implementation progress report, including the innovative Scale-up Dashboard, and the Grant Portfolio overview. With the 'Leave no one behind' agenda in mind, the delegation appreciated the progress shown towards the 30-by-30 targets, especially the DTG adoption by 116 countries. However, they noted the issue of exclusion of high-risk groups, such as miners, prisoners, and slum dwellers, from the TB report. Communities also expressed concerns that only 54% of HIV products are achieving good or strong scale-up, compared to 83% for malaria products, and reiterated the need for Unitaid's implementing partners to improve their engagement with country partners.

The delegation supported calls for more gender and racial diversity within the Secretariat and reiterated the recommendation to disaggregate community organizations into community-led and community-based organizations in the next partner survey. Regarding the definition of 'community engagement,' the delegation suggested widely distributing the **Community Engagement Framework** to help partners and implementers understand that 'Communities,' according to Unitaid's definition, are people with direct lived experience. During the delegation retreat in India, the delegation noticed that government-employed Community Healthcare Workers in the Post-partum Haemorrhage project are also considered part of the affected community.

Communities appreciated the investments in Community Advisory Boards (CABs) and small grants to improve community engagement. However, many CABs expire at the closure of projects, which is not sustainable for achieving sustainable responsible scale-up. Small grants, on the other hand, will support communities in creating awareness, generating demand, and ultimately advocating for scale-up when financially supported.

Resource Mobilisation

The Deputy Executive Director's presentation on resource mobilisation outlined Unitaid's commitment to increasing multi-year contributions, broadening the donor base, and amplifying visibility through increased communications. This includes the initiation of a monthly newsletter and an update of the website by the end of this year.

The current projection for 2024 funding is estimated between \$170-185 million USD, with contributions from one new donor, the European Commission, as well as multi-year agreements from Norway and Spain. During the Board meeting, Spain announced its renewed commitment to Unitaid through a multi-year agreement (2024-2026) of 2 million euros per year. Communities applaud Spain and Norway for their continued support to Unitaid.

New Areas for Intervention

Following the recommendations by the Policy and Strategy Committee, the Board unanimously approved five new areas for intervention (Afls). These new investment areas will strengthen Unitaid's pipeline in low- and middle-income countries by advancing core work in women's and children's health, regional manufacturing, health system strengthening, and pandemic preparedness and response. Specifically, the interventions will:

- Improve access to care for moderate and severe **anemia** in pregnant and nursing women, children, and people affected by malaria.
- Enhance risk detection and management of **pre-eclampsia**, a potentially fatal pregnancy complication.
- Advance innovations in sustainable **oxygen** production and supply.
- Promote people-centered care through **integrated diagnostic tools** and delivery, and expand access to **self-testing** for cervical cancer, HIV, and tuberculosis.
- Support **regional manufacturing** of priority health products for equitable access and health security.

The Communities delegation welcomed the approval of the five Afls and joined other delegations in emphasizing the need for strong linkages between the resource mobilization strategy and the Investment Plan. Communities advocated for including specific funding in the Investment Plan for Unitaid's role as a convener, influencer, and pathfinder, particularly for scalability purposes since it is increasingly investing in areas such as women's and children's health where there are no natural scale-up partners.

Regarding the approved investment area for detection and management of pre-eclampsia, the delegation recommended engaging women-led community networks to educate pregnant women on pre-eclampsia symptoms and the importance of seeking medical attention early. Increasing disease awareness and treatment literacy among communities, especially among women of childbearing age, will help avert pre-eclampsia-related mortality.

The Dolutegravir story

The two-day Board meeting concluded with the Partners' Session on the introduction and roll-out of DTG, with presentations from partners at AfroCAB, WHO, the Medicines Patent Pool, CHAI, the Kenyan Ministry of Health, the European Commission, and a Communities Delegation representative. 2024 marked a significant milestone as Unitaid and its partners celebrated 10 years of success with DTG, a best-in-class HIV treatment Unitaid helped introduce.

The Communities delegation member shared her personal HIV story publicly for the first time and felt that her voice was truly heard by the entire Board. The delegation congratulated her on the

stellar and deeply moving intervention that captivated the Board. The Communities Delegation also highlighted the importance of Unitaid's work on paediatric formulations and the vital and unique role that Unitaid played as a convener, pathfinder, and influencer during the introduction of DTG and called upon the Secretariat to apply the lessons learned from DTG to avoid similar mistakes with Lenacapravir and CAB-LA.

Governance updates

Key governance decisions taken at the 44th Board Meeting included the approval of the 2023 audited financial statements and the adoption of a revised version of the Board's Code of Ethical Conduct recommended by the Governance Working Group.

The Board extended the leadership and membership of the Finance and Accountability Committee (FAC) and Policy and Strategy Committee (PSC) for a 2-year mandate. Communities will continue to hold the positions of Vice-Chair of the FAC and Observer at the PSC. France will remain the Chair of the PSC, African Countries will remain the Vice-Chair of the PSC and the UK will remain the Chair of the FAC.

The Board approved the extension of Japan's temporary Board seat until the end of 2027 and the next Executive Board meeting will take place in South Africa from December 3 to 5, including field visits.



Photo: Communities Board members a.i. Louis Da Gama (Portugal) and Carol Nawina (Zambia), joined by Delegation members Abdul-Fatawu Salifu (Ghana), Immaculate Owomugisha Bazare (Uganda) and Liaison Officer Wim Vandeveld (South Africa) during the EB44 Board meeting in the Global Health Campus, Geneva (June 2024)

Access Fresque and Unitaid Advocates Network

Following the EB44 Board meetings, the Communities delegation participated in the Access Fresque, a half-day interactive training session jointly developed by the Secretariat with the [Graduate Institute, Geneva](#). The objective of this session was to deepen Board Members' understanding of access issues, the various stakeholders involved, and the types of interventions needed to address innovation, availability, quality, affordability, supply and delivery, demand, and adoption at scale. This unique exercise gathered representatives from 10 Board constituencies and will be repeated during [AIDS 2024](#), the 25th International AIDS Conference, which will take place in Munich, Germany, on 23 July 2024.

The delegation also joined the [Unitaid Advocates Network \(UAN\)](#) Project Advisory Group (PAG) meeting, held alongside the Board meetings and attended by the GFAN project team and the NGO delegation. The project team gave an overview of the UAN's recent activities and the proposed work plan until the Unitaid grant ends in November this year. Participants discussed the upcoming launch of the UAN website and social media channels, and the team asked for support from the delegations to collect information for effective resource mobilization. To learn more about the new network and to join the UAN mailing list, click on this [link](#).

July 2024

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 of the Communities Delegation, at wvandevelde@gnpplus.net