Treatment Action Group

WHO Director-General's TB Vaccine Accelerator Council
Second High-Level Meeting of the Council I May 28, 2024

Statement delivered by civil society representative Mike Frick (Treatment Action Group)

- It's my privilege to provide a perspective from civil society to the TB Vaccine Accelerator Council.
- First, let me share my endorsement of the three high-level objectives for the Council's first term. I am encouraged to see that the three objectives and the milestones under each strongly emphasize one of the central challenges to developing new TB vaccines: chronic under-funding.
- For the last decade I have led Treatment Action Group's work to track global expenditures on TB research. Our data paint a clear and sobering picture: the world simply does not spend enough on research to develop new TB vaccines. If we are sincere about meeting our goals to end TB—the deadlines endorsed by UN member states at the High-Level Meeting on TB and in the End TB Strategy and the SDGs—then funding for TB vaccines must increase by a true order of magnitude.
- For this reason, I am heartened to see milestones that speak to both push funding—the primary way TB vaccine R&D has been funded to date—as well as pull mechanisms that would introduce new financial tools.
- Yes, we need to spend more money on TB vaccine research. But just as important: we need to raise the right type of financing, from a diverse group of funders, and deploy it under the right conditions. This requires a blended approach, one that combines push, pull, and other incentives.
- But we must also be careful to avoid the mistakes of prior pull mechanisms, ones tried for other diseases, and ensure that the rewards we offer accelerate research in tandem with—and not at the expense of—equitable access, and also align with other important goals such as the move to regional, diversified manufacturing.
- And we should not forget bigger policy solutions that free fiscal space for countries in invest in health and health R&D, including sovereign debt forgiveness for the 21 high-TB-burden countries at risk of debt distress.

- When I refer to "right conditions" I am referring to the legally binding obligations of human rights law. And to one right in particular: the human right of everyone to enjoy the benefits and applications of scientific progress.
- The right to science obligates governments to take three actions: they must develop science, which includes investing in innovation. They must diffuse its benefits, which entails sharing tangible applications of science, such as vaccines. And they must conserve science, which means sustaining its advances for future generations.
- Governments must work on all three aspects in concert, not in isolation. It is critical, in my view, that any new funding mechanism touch on all three right-to-science obligations: develop, diffuse, and conserve.

- We need financial instruments and tools that blur the boundaries between clinical development, on the one hand, and manufacturing, procurement, and implementation, on the other. A one-off advanced purchase commitment, made in isolation of complementary investments in both early and late-stage R&D, risks delivering partial or time-limited solutions.

- I base my remarks on human rights for another reason: they establish a contract between governments and their people, and we need governments to live up to their side of this contract.
- It should be clear to everyone that recent large investments in TB vaccines have all come from the charity sector. It is admirable that philanthropies such as the Gates Foundation, Wellcome, and Open Philanthropy have together committed hundreds of millions of dollars for TB vaccine development. But this largess has thrown the absence of comparable financial commitments by governments into stark relief. The public sector must step up.
- A final point: public investments in new TB vaccines must come with conditionalities and safeguards to ensure that new vaccines can reach everyone who needs them – without discrimination or unfair delay. Just as we create clinical standards for judging vaccine safety and efficacy, we need to establish conditions for ensuring equitable access to the direct and indirect benefits of vaccination.
- It is therefore essential that governments insist on access conditionalities for all publicly funded research and greater transparency of research inputs and results. Conditionalities and transparency requirements should span the R&D continuum.
    - After all, scientists require access to the means, methods and materials of scientific discovery.
    - Communities affected by TB have a right to participate in research as more than just clinical trial participants.
    - And governments and donors require access to data on pricing, intellectual property, supply chain, and research costs to make informed decisions in the manufacturing, purchasing, and delivery of vaccines.
- In the words of the political declaration of the 2023 High-Level Meeting on TB, such conditionalities are about "ensur[ing] equitable access and maximal return on public investment in scientific progress."