

“COVID-19 is not the first global pandemic that affects communities in Africa disproportionately. We need to interrogate why lessons were not learned through previous epidemics that affected the region.” – Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng

Below are some key takeaways from the conversation:

- The pandemic has further exposed preexisting gaps in domestic health financing and an over-dependence on donors. For the African population, too many basic human rights are dependent on philanthropy. This is not sustainable. The availability of health care workers, accessibility of clinics, and quality of care are major concerns, and the continent cannot rely on importation to drive up the quality of care. In response, Africa must mobilize its own resources and decrease reliance on global production of commodities like condoms, personal protective equipment, and essential medicines.
- The right to health for all is nonnegotiable, and COVID-19 should not be used as an excuse to stop protecting and promoting human rights. Policies must therefore consider all populations, including the most vulnerable. One example is government-sponsored community programs for pregnant women.
- The right to health is linked to international human rights and standards. Therefore, there is a need to hold governments accountable to the protocols and commitments they have signed on to. Furthermore, African countries need to have commitments in place *before* a crisis hits so citizens can use these commitments to demand accountability in an emergency situation.
- Emphasizing UHC is key to ensuring all people have access to health, including in rural areas.

Furthermore, UHC and strong health systems will allow for anticipation and prevention of future outbreaks.

Outlined below are additional experiences and lessons learned on how to best pursue long-term health goals:

- When the pandemic hit, governments were forced to swiftly put into place COVID-19 prevention measures without taking time to engage or receive buy-in from citizens or even civil society organizations. This led to a lack of accountability in many governments that should have previously been challenged by civil society organizations. Doing so in the future will help make sure that resources are put to good use, the biggest health problems are being addressed, young people are being engaged, and that areas outside of health are not being affected.

“Young people exhibit verve in all the things they do, which is an advantage of integrating them in the policy development process. Young people need to be meaningfully engaged in all these processes, from conception through M&E.”
– *Desmond Nji*

- When it comes to handling COVID-19, a lot can be learned from the HIV pandemic, including around effective communication and handling social stigma. The HIV community should be tapped to teach us all that a human rights approach is a good way to address stigma around COVID-19. We should put a human face on the epidemic through personal stories.
- African countries are realizing the importance of holistic policies and investing in UHC, such as with health insurance. There is progress in this area, especially in countries like Rwanda



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and Senegal. However, this needs to be catalyzed and fast-tracked to respond to this pandemic and prevent future outbreaks.

- To ensure policies are financed, there is need to emphasize communication and education for communities, including involving religious leaders.
- There is a need to be strategic as we advocate and think about how Africa can lead the world when it comes to research and development. Africa needs to learn how to manage its supply chain and quality of care. This can only be improved by not relying on importation.
- Health funding should prioritize pandemic prevention over response.

“We are emphasizing universal health coverage in Senegal, and ensuring all people have access to health—including in rural areas—will allow us to better anticipate and prevent future outbreaks.”
– *Hon Awa Gueye*

Below are some additional points that were discussed pertaining to the power of youth and the need to ensure gender equality:

- Decisionmakers need to think of young people as a pool of human capital and technical knowledge. Investing in youth helps reap the full benefits of health and wellbeing.
- Young people have technical knowledge and should be given space to share their ideas and the opportunity to help to develop innovative health solutions.
- Civil society must educate, capacitate, and empower young people to build the skills needed to track national budgets and engage in political processes. Doing so will ensure young people are empowered as agents of transformative leadership and innovation.

- There is need to ensure gender equality through the development of all policies and focus on women and children, including consolidating the spirit of solidarity by including the youth.
- Individuals must be invested in first and foremost. Scholarship and thought leadership need to be prioritized to maintain excellence in Africa and prevent brain drain, especially for women. If young girls are to become scientists and stay in the region, they need to be free of violence, have access to reproductive health commodities, and be eating well.

This session was facilitated by **Deogratias Agaba**, PATH's Senior Communications Officer for Advocacy and Public Policy in Uganda.



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