TO:
Peter Sands, Executive Director of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM)
Dr Muhammad Pate, Executive Director, the Global Financing Facility (GFF)
Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO)
Dr Seth Berkley, CEO, GAVI
David R. Malpass, President of the World Bank Group
Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund

CC:
Working for Health Initiative, ILO, OECD, WHO (Multi-Partner Trust Fund)
European Commission’s Director General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO)

Call to Urgently Prioritise International Funding Support for the Recruitment of Human Resources for Health in Resource-Limited Contexts Amid COVID-19

We are writing on behalf of national and global civil society organisations who are signatories to this letter. Together, we call for urgent mobilisation, pooling and designation of international resources to support and complement existing governments investments in recruitment and remuneration of human resources for health in contexts with limited resources and other high disease burdens.

We welcome that a number of funding institutions have already made additional global resources available to governments of low- and middle-income countries, allowing responses to the threat that COVID-19 poses to communities; e.g. research, vaccine development, protective personal equipment for health workers, test kits and programme management response support.

However, we note that the financial support packages do not specifically prioritise the urgent need to recruit additional health personnel in resource-limited contexts and improve remuneration and working conditions of those currently providing services. Given the unprecedented pressure on advanced health systems, we have grave concerns for those countries where severe shortages of health personnel in normal circumstances have been insufficiently addressed. The current crisis offers funders in global health the opportunity to commit and contribute to pooled and adequate funding resulting in significant long-term investments in the health workforce based on robust analysis of the health labour markets. This is to address shortages for the short term COVID-19 response, but also to build strong future health system resilience and health workforce preparedness and response capability. Moreover, it will guarantee readiness for public health threats, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and health for all as a human right.

Most of the agencies we address this letter to have committed to work together, both with governments and each other, in their programmatic, operational and financial policies by signing the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being. They committed to being gender-transformative, equity-oriented, rights-based and people-centred in their actions overall, and - when it comes to financing for health - to ensure better generation, allocation and use of public and pooled funds for health. We urge the agencies to live by these principles in COVID-19 relief and recovery efforts, including advancing human resources for health.

Most national governments have developed and costed human resources for health plans, but these are not always adequately implemented due to fiscal and budgetary constraints. In addition, austerity

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1 Africa has a share of 24% of the global burden of disease, yet, only 3% of the global health workforce. Many countries are far below the SDG threshold of 4.45 health workers per 1,000 recommended by WHO; for example, in Kenya 1.79, in Zambia 0.98, in Uganda 0.74, in Tanzania 0.44, and in Malawi only 0.35 health workers per 1,000 population.
measures such as wage containment have stalled investment in the health workforce for many years. This triggered remuneration and recruitment freezes that led to a drastically reduced number of jobs in the health sector, despite numerous unemployed health workers in many countries. Among the unemployed are many women and youths, leaving them without a livelihood. These unemployed health workers now constitute a crucial untapped resource in the response to COVID-19. We need urgent collaborative action to enable governments to recruit these workers and protect them, and to rapidly scale up the training and recruitment of millions additional protected and equipped health workers to deliver health care for all. Governments cannot afford to divert their limited employed health workforce as this could stall or even reverse the efforts and gains achieved in HIV/AIDS, TB, sexual and reproductive health, malaria, maternal and child health programmes, among others.

Health taxes, efficiency improvements and public financial reforms as currently advised will only mobilise limited resources and will not be enough to support countries to cope with their needs for health personnel amid the pandemic, and beyond.

As 70% of health workers globally are women, it is also critical that support for human resources for health - during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond - applies a gender lens. Countries and agencies should ensure that the recruitment and training of health workers are gender-responsive and take steps to close the 28% gender pay gap in health. Funding mechanisms should apply a gender marker, or best practices in gender budgeting, analysis, and auditing, to promote accountability for the gender dynamics of the health workforce.

As civil society, we call on GAVI the Vaccine Alliance, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), the Global Financing Facility (GFF), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (WHO) to address the gaps in human resources for health, leveraging and improving the existing global strategies, specifically the Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030, and the Working for Health and Growth: Investing in the Health Workforce High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth (HEEG). While we ask all addressed parties to mobilise funds for the swift recruitment of additional, and the steady retainment of existing health personnel, we also call on considering the sustainability of their investment.

Specifically, we ask:

1. **GAVI** to include recruitment of more health workers in coordination with national governments, now and in the long run, to ensure the continuation of services during the pandemic and beyond. GAVI’s areas of support now include training of health workers, testing and infection control supplies, surveillance activities and coordination. By supporting the recruitment of health personnel, the flexibility that GAVI provides to countries to reallocate up to 10% of their existing Health System Strengthening grants to COVID-19 response will truly support the strengthening of health systems.

2. The **GFATM** to continue allowing countries to use funding in the new grant cycle as well as in the COVID-19 response reprogrammed resources and any additional COVID-19 resources, to pay for the training, recruitment, support and remuneration of health care workers. We also ask the GFATM to explicitly encourage governments to use these funds for the creation of extra posts for health workers in addition to the priorities outlined in the guidelines[^2] , which currently include epidemic preparedness assessment, laboratory testing, sample transportation, use of surveillance infrastructure, infection control in health facilities, and information campaigns.

[^2]: [https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9397/core_covid-19_guidancenote_en.pdf?u=637189162540000000]
3. The **GFF** to urgently remove any restrictions attached to their loans and grants that prevent countries from using GFF resources for the recruitment of health care workers, safeguarding service provision for women, children, and adolescents during the pandemic. We call on the GFF to acknowledge this major bottleneck in the health systems of their recipient countries by developing a clear strategy on the financing of human resources for health, benefitting the health systems of their partner countries during the pandemic and beyond.

4. The **IMF** to put an end to policy conditionality and advice that leads to spending restrictions on health, in particular to the health workforce, including for programmes approved prior to the pandemic. We call on the IMF to offer immediate cancellation of all debt payments to the IMF for the remainder of 2020 and a possible extension of the cancellation to 2021 to free up resources towards strengthening the health workforce and health systems overall. Finally, we ask for facilitation of debt restructuring and relief with widened eligibility criteria, beyond IDA-only countries³.

5. The **World Bank** to invest in universal access to free public health care and in public health systems in low- and middle-income countries, ensuring access to free health care and the right to health to the entire population. We also ask to make any additional resources available for governments to allocate to recurrent costs, without restrictions, so that they can use funds according to needs, including the recruitment and retention of health personnel. We call for the World Bank to offer a cancellation of all debt payments due in 2020 and possibly 2021, and the facilitation of broader debt restructuring and relief to all countries in need, beyond IDA-only countries. Finally, we ask the Bank to refrain from structural adjustment reforms that weaken countries’ public health system now and in the future. Freed-up resources should be prioritised towards strengthening the health workforce and health systems overall.

6. The **WHO**, in its normative and expert role to issue strong messages in its daily media briefs regarding the critical need to recruit additional health workers and support existing ones in high disease burden contexts and to call on international donors to support this. We ask WHO, ILO and OECD to leverage their existing partnership and lead global efforts towards strengthening human resources for health now and in the future. We call on the WHO to issue clear policy guidelines and recommendations to donors on how to best support human resources for health sustainably with long-term, pooled and reliable investments.

We would very much appreciate an open dialogue on these asks in the form of a virtual meeting with you, global and national civil society, and other stakeholders, to discuss these specific human resources for health investment asks in more detail at your earliest convenience. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Mariëlle Bemelmans  
**Director Wemos**

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³ International Development Association (IDA)
## SIGNATORIES

1. Abubuwa Societal Development Initiatives (ASDI)
2. Accountability International
3. Action against hunger (regional office of West and central Africa)
4. Action for Improvement of Food Child and Mother
5. Advocacy Network Africa (AdNetA)
6. Afara 360
7. Afrihealth Optonet Association
8. Al-Asar Development Organization
9. Amref Health Africa
10. ARPAN
11. Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV (APN+)
12. Association for Promotion Sustainable Development
13. Associations des jeunes pour la lutte contre le sida et la Pauvreté
14. AWTAD anti-corruption organization
15. Basic Integrated Rural Development Society (BIRDS)
16. Benjamin William Mkapa Foundation (BMF)
17. Center for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD)
18. Centre for Health Science and Law
19. Child Awareness Project
20. Children and Young People Living for Peace
22. CISE Malawi
23. Coalition of African National Medical Associations (CANMA)
24. Collective for Food Security and Rural Development (COSADER)
25. Community Active in Development Association-CADA
26. Community Care Foundation-Uganda (CCFU)
27. Community Initiative Action Group Kenya(CIAG-K)
28. Connected Advocacy For Empowerment and Youth Development Initiative
29. Cordaid
30. Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung (DSW)
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National Disability & Development Forum (NDF)
National Nurses Association of Kenya
Nebbi District NGO Forum
New Life Organization
Nigerian Women Agro Allied Farmers Association (NIWAAFA)
N'weti
ODI Niger
Organization of African Youth
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Initiative (OLPHI)
Oxfam
Participatory Village Development Program (PVDP)
Pathways Policy Institute
Peace Foundation Pakistan
Pharmaceutical Society of Kenya
PHM Kenya
PHM North America
PHM Uganda
plan: g – partnership for global health
Pleaders of children and Elderly People at risk (PEPA)
Policies for Equitable Access to Health – PEAH
Rainbow Mirrors Uganda
Reproductive Advocate Health Education
Rick Rowden (on personal title), Adjunct Professorial Lecturer, School of International Service, American university in Washington DC.
Roke Telkom Uganda
Rural Infrastructure and Human Resource Development Organization (RIHRDO)
Rwenzori Center for Research and Advocacy
Ryculture Health and Social Innovation
S.O.S.- Criança e Desenvolvimento Integral De Angola
Safe Water and AIDS Project (SWAP)
Salud por Derecho
Save the Children
Sewa Development Trust Sindh
Shanduko Yeupenyu Child Care
Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN)
Socio Economic Research and Development Centre (SERDEC)
Solidarity Hospital Buea
Soren Ambrose (on personal title)
SOS Jeunesse et Défis
Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI)
Stretchers Youth Organization
Success Capital Organisation
Sukaar Welfare Organization
TAMSA Tanzania
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122 The international Organization for Human Rights Development and Environment Sierra Leone Chapter
123 The Observatory for Sustainable Infrastructure
124 The People's Fund for Global Health and Development
125 The White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood Tanzania
126 Tinada Youth Organization (TiYO)
127 Training for Health Equity Network:THEnet
128 Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET)
129 Ukana West 2 Community Based Health Initiative (CBHI)
130 Union des Amis Socio Culturels d'Action en Developpement (UNASCAD)
131 Vikash Samukhya
132 Volunteers Welfare for Community Based Care of Zambia (VOWAZA)
133 WASH-Net Sierra Leone
134 West African Academy of Public Health
135 White Ribbon Alliance-Uganda
136 Women Deliver
137 World Merit Burundi
138 Youth and Environment Vision (YEV).
139 Youth Engage
140 Youth Initiative for the Promotion of Good Leadership in Nigeria
141 Youth Organization
142 Youth Secretariat of Haiti
143 Zero Poor Africa (ZPA)