To defeat COVID-19 and safeguard the critical fight against HIV, TB & malaria, additional domestic and international funding is needed... 

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Introduction and overview

GFAN Africa mobilized civil society voices to join #TheBeatContinues campaign, urging for sustained focus on HIV, TB and Malaria amid the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 weakened the fragile health systems in Africa and continues to negatively affect the most vulnerable communities while threatening progress on defeating HIV, TB, malaria, and other life-threatening diseases. Governments, private sector, civil society, scientists, health organizations, and communities are working and have made impressive strides to fight this pandemic and save lives.

The COVID-19 vaccine, which was developed in record time, is an outstanding achievement and an additional measure to defeat the disease. With an understanding of the highs and lows of the continuing COVID-19 response and recovery, GFAN Africa’s #TheBeatContinues campaign ran from May to December 2020.

Background

COVID-19 is a threat to gains made over the years to defeat the HIV, TB, and malaria epidemics. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, GFAN Africa ran #TheBeatContinues campaign in 2020, bringing together civil society voices from Zambia, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Tanzania, Eswatini, Rwanda, Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Niger, Senegal, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Benin. Advocacy efforts aimed to strengthen work to defeat COVID-19 and mitigate its effects on HIV, TB and malaria programs.

This campaign reached out to governments, regional bodies (such as, the African Union and the Commonwealth Ministers for Health), donors, communities, media practitioners and civil society. Added to #TheBeatContinues campaign was the #UniteToFight campaign.
Our Approach

GFAN Africa’s COVID-19 response was Pan African – coordinated across 13 Anglophone and Francophone countries in Africa. The implementing partners were Community Working Group on Health in Zimbabwe; Impact Santé Afrique in Benin, Niger, Cameroon, DRC and Senegal; CITAM Plus in Zambia; Tanzania Network of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (TNW+) in Tanzania; Hope for Future Generations (HFFG) in Ghana; Journalists Against AIDS in Nigeria; Health Rights Education Programme in Malawi; Lean on Me Foundation in Kenya; and, WACI Health in South Africa.

The thematic groups of focus were adolescent girls and young women, communities affected by HIV and/or TB communities, communities affected by malaria, sex workers, and women living with HIV.

To reach out to various audiences, GFAN Africa and partners used print media, social media, communications collateral (such as videos and posters translated into local languages), webinars and in-person meetings to disseminate the key messages.

In addition, GFAN Africa worked in collaboration with GFAN Asia Pacific to support #TheUHCThatWeWant campaign.
Our Messages

01
To defeat COVID-19 and safeguard the critical fight against HIV, TB and malaria, additional domestic and international funding is needed.

02
To defeat COVID-19, the response must address gender barriers, stigma and discrimination, and protect human rights.

03
To defeat COVID-19, protect progress against HIV, TB and malaria, and save lives, we must unite to fight.
Our Activities

To amplify the voices of communities and disseminate messages to online audiences, GFAN Africa organized live Vuka Africa shows. Vuka Africa is an online platform managed by WACI Health that is used to discuss health topics.

During the shows, speakers shared their experiences in the communities regarding access to HIV, TB, and malaria services, and spoke about GFAN Africa’s key messages in relation to their experiences. Audiences were able to follow the shows in real time on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, or to watch later. Here is a link to one of the shows.

Civil society in Ghana, Eswatini, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe produced videos with messages for their communities on COVID-19. The messages were disseminated widely on social media and to the target communities. In Malawi, the videos were produced in the local language.

Further work towards disseminating messages entailed webinars for civil society and communities. During the webinars, key messages and discussions highlighted the
need to sustain focus on HIV, TB, and malaria amid COVID-19; asking leaders and donors to increase domestic and international funding for health; and, asking for a human rights approach to health interventions. [Here](#) are details of a webinar that took place on 3 September 2020.

During the roundtable, journalists were briefed on #TheBeatContinues campaign and the relevance of its key messages. Articles were published in mainstream media in Ghana (such as [this](#) and [this](#)) advocating for increased allocation of resources for sustainable health financing and amplifying the concerns and asks of civil society and communities. Additional articles were published in Eswatini, Ghana, and Zimbabwe to mark World AIDS Day as well as in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, and Cameroon on various dates throughout the campaign. World AIDS Day, the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, World Mosquito Day, and World Malaria Day served as key advocacy moments.

**TO DEFEAT COVID-19, PROTECT PROGRESS**

**AGAINST HIV, TB AND MALARIA, AND SAVE LIVES, WE MUST UNITE TO FIGHT**
In support of building strong and resilient systems for health, GFAN Africa participated in the Inaugural African Union Biennial Joint Meeting of Ministers of Health and Finance for Eastern and Southern Africa regions on 8 – 9 October 2020.

A statement was issued acknowledging the leadership of the African Union on the ALM framework and commitments; it also urges governments to allocate additional resources for health, address social barriers to equitable access to health services, and invest more resources in health research and development. The full statement is [here](#).
COVID-19 is slowing down gains towards achieving universal healthcare coverage. Towards this end, GFAN Africa sent letters to ministers for health and ministers for finance emphasizing the need for increased investments in health, and asked that the available resources be used prudently. In this letter, GFAN Africa asked Kenya's Minister for Health to sustain focus on all life-threatening diseases amid COVID-19.

Community engagement is key to achieving desired health outcomes. Civil society in Eswatini organized a roundtable discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls living with HIV.

The participating Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) from different support groups of people living with HIV from all four regions of the country shared their experiences on how they were accessing treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. They spoke about the impact of the pandemic on them and their livelihoods. They asked the government to ensure fair and improved distribution of COVID-19 relief and support services, including the distribution of hygiene packs, to persons living with HIV and especially to women- and child-headed households as they are most vulnerable to malnutrition.

#TheBeatContinues campaign joined in constituency engagements to build stronger networks and amplify voices to spread the campaign messages widely.

On 22 October, GFAN Africa jointly with RUN4TB, an advocacy and communications campaign to catalyze community and civil society voices for TB advocacy in Africa, organized a dialogue with parliamentarians titled Reporting on UN HLM TB progress report and the 2020 Global TB report.

During the conversations, there was emphasis that TB and COVID-19 screening should be done simultaneously, and that COVID-19 and TB policies and laws should be integrated. In addition, there was emphasis on the need to ensure that governments fulfil their UN HLM commitments and pledges to the Global Fund so that TB services are adequately funded and accessible. This will also strengthen research and innovation of TB tools and commodities.
On social media, GFAN Africa continued to disseminate key messages reaching out to global, regional and country stakeholders including communities.

The protection of communities and frontline healthcare workers from COVID-19 is key to defeating the disease and ensuring a continuum of services to defeat other life-threatening diseases such as HIV, TB, and malaria.

In Zimbabwe, GFAN Africa partner Community Working Group on Health distributed soap, facemasks, sanitizers, and personal protective equipment as well as promoted hygiene practices in households and communities. Information, education and communication (IEC) materials, including posters, T-shirts and facemasks, were distributed to increase awareness of COVID-19 prevention measures.

Some of the IEC materials such as posters were produced in local languages in Zambia and in Tanzania. Educational skits were produced and shared widely through social media platforms. Peer educators and community health workers have were trained on COVID-19 prevention and participated in campaigns to raise awareness about the disease.

Civil society organizations in Benin, Niger, Cameroon, DRC and Senegal were trained in advocacy, specifically on skills that enabled them work in the context of COVID-19. Trainings focused on how to develop advocacy messages, write letters and newspaper articles, and develop and run their own campaigns.

The civil society stakeholders in these countries documented their HIV, TB, and malaria situations in the context of COVID-19. The documentation showing the impact of COVID-19 on programmes to fight HIV, TB and malaria informed advocacy messages to leaders asking them to commit to defeating the three diseases.
Conversations with policymakers on resources for health are important to explore effective ways of ensuring that health is adequately funded in order to meet targets, including those for ending TB. In Zambia, CITAM Plus organized a meeting of the Stop TB Caucus and the parliamentary health committee in Zambia and emphasized the need to safeguard the critical fight against TB and other life-threatening diseases.

Clearly outlined advocacy plans for awareness raising and resource mobilization are key to achieving desired results. In Tanzania, the Tanzania Network of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (TNW+) organized a meeting of civil society and communities for a review of resource mobilization efforts before, during, and after the COVID-19 outbreak. They identified gaps, detailed how best to adapt to the COVID-19 situation, and developed a plan of action to inform their advocacy work.

**Going Forward**

GFAN Africa continues to urge increased investments in health for stronger and resilient health systems that are able to withstand current and future pandemics. Strong systems for health are critical to defeat the HIV, TB and malaria epidemics, and to achieve the 2030 agenda – particularly, health and wellbeing for all. Everybody, including the poor and vulnerable and regardless of where they are, should have access to efficient, effective, and affordable healthcare whenever they need it.
The Beat Continues