

71st SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

Author: Tackling Deadly Diseases in Africa (TDDA)

Agenda item Special event on the COVID-19 response in the WHO African Region

Statement:

TACKLING DEADLY DISEASES IN AFRICA INTERVENTION FOR WHO-AFRO 71st COMMITTEE

COVID-19 continues extracting wide reaching impact despite global, national and local efforts. The pandemic has put a spotlight on our collective human and economic vulnerability. It has also put the issue of equity into sharp relief. We have seen social determinants shape differential exposure, access and impact of infection on poorer and more socially excluded populations.

A vital way of effectively and equitably mitigating the cost of the epidemic is for member states to activate a “whole of society” approach to health and social protection. We must drive the resilience necessary to deliver the foundational life-saving services of Universal Health Coverage **and** establish the preparedness and response capabilities necessary to mitigate the full range of conditions of pandemic threats, including COVID-19.

Working closing with WHO AFRO and Africa CDC as well as member states in East, West and Central Africa, UKaid-supported Tackling Deadly Diseases in Africa (TDDA) urges WHO/AFRO, member states and partners to take advantage of this crisis to advance this necessary “whole of society” approach. For example, although Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are well established in efforts to improve the maternal-child health continuum of care and HIV/AIDS related services, their potential has yet to be realized in “integrated health security” in general and with the COVID-19 response in particular.

Recent experience from across the continent provides evidence about how CSOs can contribute to strengthening integrated health security. CSOs can facilitate national efforts to link communities with health systems. They provide boot-on-the-ground support for community-based/events-based surveillance, risk communication and demand creation, especially around vaccination. Africa continues to face a “vaccine famine.” Still we ignore vaccine hesitancy at our own peril. We urge WHO and member states to redouble effort for a “whole of society” approach to integrated health security in general and COVID-19 vaccine role out in particular. While global issues around supply chain and vaccine equity need urgent resolution, approaching communities respectfully and on their own terms can increase trust in the system and set the ground work for the successful immunization campaign we need to ensure that that both this pandemic and the next one will no longer extract their avertable cost on human health and wellbeing.

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