

MEET THE TARGET

Young People in Asia-Pacific call on World Leaders for a Sustainable World for the Leaders of Tomorrow by Achieving Commitments in Fighting HIV, TB and Malaria

This year, the world celebrated International Youth Day on 12 August under the theme “Green Skills for Youth: Towards a Sustainable World” with the United Nations Secretary-General (UN SG) emphasizing that “Across all of today’s challenges, young people are calling for bold and accelerated action, standing in solidarity with the most vulnerable, and designing solutions to ensure social, economic and climate justice, and peace and prosperity for all”.¹

2030 is the finish line for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a promise made by world leaders to all, more so for young people. Impacted by and still reeling from COVID-19 and political tensions, we are harshly reminded that we are not on track towards a sustainable world. Young people are at the forefront of severe world problems, including existing epidemics, geopolitical frictions; economic crises; natural disasters; and displacements. The Asia-Pacific region is home to 60% of young people in the world, making it the most youthful region.

Yet, adolescents and young people across the region continue to be severely affected by HIV, TB and malaria. In 2021, there were an estimated 260,000 new HIV infections in Asia-Pacific countries, and young people aged 15-24 years accounted for 26% of these cases. In 2021, children between 0-14 years of age globally constituted about 10.9% of the total estimated incident TB cases², with the same age group contributed towards 14% of total HIV-negative TB deaths. In 2021, every two minutes, a child dies of malaria and according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and there were 247 million malaria cases and 619,000 deaths attributed to malaria.

“India, the world’s most populated country is hosting the G20 Summit this year with the theme “One Earth. One Family. One Future.” with its Health Working Group working towards creating sustainable well-being societies committed to achieving equitable health for the present and future generations. Just this year, India has faced unfortunate climate change with numerous natural disasters, which have impacted the well-being of people – both physically and mentally. The ongoing climate crisis is only going to exacerbate HIV, TB and malaria responses in a region which is densely populated. The young are the ones who will suffer in the days to come. With the right political will, commitments and investments, we can still overturn these events and get back on track,” said Karon Lama Zimba, Advocacy and Network Engagement Officer at Youth Voices Count.

With world leaders coming together in September 2023 at the UN headquarters to adopt the Political Declarations of three High-Level Meetings on Health – Tuberculosis (TB), Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPPR), the world has another opportunity to recommit towards ending TB as an epidemic, achieving UHV that leaves no one behind and equipping the world to prevent and face any future pandemics.

Lack of investments in HIV, TB and malaria responses nationally and globally steers us away from achieving a sustainable world. In 2022, over 12 organisations led by young people spread across the world signed on to an open letter³ to the Heads of States of donor countries of the Global Fund to Fight HIV, TB and malaria (Global Fund) to raise at least US\$18 billion for its Seventh Replenishment, an organisation that has saved over 50 million lives since its establishment in 2002.

¹ <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/un-secretary-generals-message-international-youth-day>

² WHO Global TB Report, 2022

³ <https://gfanasiapacific.org/youth-sign-on/>

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The Seventh Replenishment Pledging Conference A gap of US\$2.7 billion signifies new infections that can be averted and lives that could be saved, especially among young people.

Multilateral health financing facilities such as the Global Fund are crucial in our fight against existing epidemics, achieving UHC that leaves no one behind, building resilient and sustainable health systems, preparing ourselves to face future pandemics and ensuring an enabling and healthier world is built for young people. Global leaders must ensure that tested and proven investments channels such as the Global Fund are successfully resources if we are to create a greener, healthier and more sustainable world for future generations.

The Global Fund prioritises young people, especially those who are key and vulnerable to HIV, TB and malaria, including adolescent girls and young women. This commitment is seen through the recent situation analysis on Youth Engagement in Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) in Asia-Pacific which highlighted major barriers to youth representation and participation⁴ which resulted in the election of a new young key populations representative that would serve on the CCM from 2022 – 2024.

Munkh-Erdene Davaajav, Vice-Chair of Youth LEAD and a youth representative of CCM Mongolia emphasised that “highly influential organisations like the Global Fund are making efforts in breaking barriers to extend services to young people in all their diversities. There is an enhanced need for the Global Fund to invest in programmes that advocate against anti-human-centred laws and sentiments in the countries they invest in. If we leave young people behind, we can never actualize the 2030 goals and create a sustainable world for young people. We need HIV, TB and malaria to be diseases of the past and not as part of the sustainable future.”

The responsibility of creating a sustainable world for all young people lies on all of us, especially world leaders. As adolescents and young people living with, affected by and/or vulnerable to HIV, TB and malaria across the Asia-Pacific, we call for:

- Multilateral commitment to ensure investments in building a healthier, greener and better world for young people through increasing domestic resources for health, especially those that cater to young people and adolescents, supporting low- and middle-income countries via increased Official Development Assistance (ODA) and successfully resourcing multilateral health financing facilities such as the Global Fund to achieve a UHC that leaves no one behind through raising the additional US\$2.7 billion for its Seventh Replenishment.
- Facilitate youth leadership to practice meaningful and ethical engagement of young people key decision-making platforms that impact our health and rights at the local, national, regional and global levels.
- Ensure breaking barriers to address issues of discrimination and criminalization based on age, gender, sexuality, sex characteristics, drug use, choice of profession and socio-economic status and also to protect and promote human rights and gender equality for all.
- Strengthen and support community and civil society spaces and systems to ensure adolescents and young people are adequately resourced and provided with spaces for meaningful engagement and participation.
- Place young people at the centre of PPPR by building resilient and sustainable systems for health to prevent, prepare and respond to future pandemics where young people are equal partners of decision-making.

The clock is ticking to #MeetTheTarget and achieve #TheUHCThatWeNeed for young people across the world to make a greener and more sustainable world.

⁴ https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/13189/crg_2023-06-strategicinitiative_update_en.pdf

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