Advocates meet to discuss resource mobilization for national-level advocacy to support sustainable health financing and improved health outcomes

The success of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and universal health coverage (UHC) development is dependent upon the ability of civil society to enhance and expand its role as advocate, monitor, and implementer, particularly at country levels. Yet, civil society advocacy and monitoring activities are underfunded, undervalued and inadequately evaluated.

Marja Esveld from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Allan Maleche of KELIN in Kenya are co-chairs of a process coordinated by the Joep Lange Institute to discuss how to directly address this key challenge to effective health-related advocacy and to increase sustained funding for such work. The anticipated outcome of the process will be a funding mechanism to support national-level health advocacy.

Background

Advocacy by civil society has been an essential component of the progress in global health over the past 20 years. Numerous examples of the positive impact on health through advocacy by civil society abound, including in HIV, TB, malaria, sexual and reproductive health, disability rights, mental health needs, cervical cancer, drug pricing, drug policy, and maternal and child health.

Within the sphere of HIV, TB and malaria, advocacy has been a key driver of resource mobilization, equitable delivery of services, and ensuring the quality and consistency of care and the promotion and protection of human rights. But the vision of ending these epidemics cannot be achieved without addressing the social determinants and systemic inequities that exist throughout health care access and delivery. Additionally, as the SDGs and UHC increasingly drive the global public health agenda, all health advocacy must move beyond a disease-specific approach. Disease-specific work must continue, but within and as a part of a broader agenda.

And, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic only serves to further highlight the essential role of communities and civil society in mobilization for health access and human rights protection.

Reliable, sustainable funding is a key challenge. Advocacy has consistently been underfunded, particularly at national and local levels. Such resources cannot come from domestic governments, as the funding must be independent in order for advocates to work effectively. Resources for advocacy for health therefore is an essential component of international public and private financing.

This process seeks to mobilize resources for health advocacy efforts through facilitated discussions among potential donors, representatives from multilateral agencies, and civil society leadership. By the end of the year, this process aims to: (1) increase the willingness and ability of
donors to mobilize resources toward the implementation of expanded funding mechanism(s) to meet these needs; (2) reach agreement on the values, principles and structure that would shape a funding mechanism or mechanisms that are acceptable to both advocates and donors; and (3) initiate process for the next phase toward implementation.

**Progress**

The first meeting of civil society leadership to discuss these ideas took place in the Netherlands on 12–13 February. The full report from this meeting can be found at:

Attendees included nearly 40 advocates representing national health advocacy organizations, global and regional organizations and networks from multiple global regions. Meeting participants discussed:

- The need for and key roles of advocacy at national levels in improving health access and meeting development goals
- The need for and goals of funding to support these efforts
- Establishing a broad-based global coalition to advocate for improved health access and the right to health
- The values and principles that should drive any proposed funding mechanism to support national-level health advocacy
- The need for alignment with other resource mobilization efforts

Participants described the goals of a funding stream, including:

- Create an enabling environment to advocate and to build coalitions and campaigns to advance the right to health care
- Support national-level advocacy organizations to push for and ensure inclusive UHC efforts, improve quality of health services, increase domestic resource mobilization, and protect human rights within health systems
- Build and support a global coalition of health advocates working across multiple health issues and geographies

Participants also discussed the values that would drive a funding mechanism, including:

- Funding should reflect a commitment to a broad-based coalition, working beyond disease-specific silos, and should focus on advocacy, not service delivery
- Funding should be additive, not extractive
- The funding process should be sustainable, with priorities set by affected communities
- Funding should be built on trust and high levels accountability
- Emphasize joint learning, sharing information and strategies, and strong evaluation practices

**Next steps**

A full report from the meeting is available and a Civil Society Steering Committee is formed. The following initial next steps are: (1) further increase the diversity of civil society participants
involved, with an emphasis on nationally based organizations, (2) further develop ideas about goals, priorities and a potential structure for a funding mechanism; (3) work with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop and implement a donor outreach strategy and plans for joint meetings between civil society and potential donors; and (4) gather the evidence needed to show the value of health advocacy in reaching and sustaining health and development targets along with the need for substantial, sustainable and independent funding sources.