April 2020 Action Sheet

The need for resilience

Help ensure we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic with stronger health systems.

The COVID-19 outbreak shows that infectious diseases don’t respect national borders. RESULTS has long been advocating for coordinated global responses to prevent diseases and to ensure access to health for all, through interventions such as vaccination, and by ensuring good nutrition. A global health emergency demands a global response, and this is a vital moment to work in partnership with developing countries, investing in robust health systems to ensure access to health for all, especially the most marginalised, and to better respond to pandemics.

As we try to remain safe here in the UK, we see rises in COVID-19 cases in countries with far weaker health systems than our own, especially in Africa, and more people are likely to become infected and die where hospitals and emergency systems are unable to cope or simply aren’t there. As well as protecting the UK public directly, the Government must vigorously support the COVID-19 response in poorer countries, to strengthen health systems and help develop global resilience to future disease outbreaks. The UK should be applauded for its strong track record supporting global health, such as last year’s funding for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria; its support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and for its leading role in R&D into global health, including its recent financial pledge to the search for a COVID-19 vaccine. New Secretary of State for International Development Anne-Marie Trevelyan has a big role in continuing the UK’s leadership on global health. This month, when we’re all intensely concerned for the safety of people across the globe, we’re asking RESULTS advocates to collaborate virtually to write group letters to the Secretary of State, urging her to lead the UK’s efforts to help build stronger health systems.

The impact of COVID-19

At the time of writing, the COVID-19 virus has spread across the globe, with countries in sub-Saharan Africa increasingly recording cases, though as yet at lower rates than elsewhere. As we struggle in the UK to keep ourselves safe, we are now seeing outbreaks in countries with far weaker health systems than our own, and it is likely that more people will become infected and die where hospitals and emergency systems are unable to cope or simply aren’t there. Low testing capacity in some countries means that it could be more prevalent than we think. In addition to the health risks, millions of people are also likely to lose their livelihoods because of COVID’s effect on economies and jobs.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is advising people across the world how to stay safe; however, this is much harder for people living in poverty, such as people living in crowded urban slums or refugee camps, and those who have to work in risky environments, with no real option to self-isolate, and those without access to reliable safety information. People with existing health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, compromised immune systems, poor nutrition, or illnesses like TB and HIV are particularly at risk. The virus is also having a knock-on effect on other aspects of health systems. For example, TB and polio resources are being diverted to the emergency response, and there are reports that routine vaccinations for diseases such as measles are being stopped. While these are sensible short-term responses to COVID-19, the reprioritising of services will have severe short and long-term impacts on provision of other health services.

The importance of strong health systems

Good health is an essential element of overcoming poverty; yet in many poorer countries, health systems are inadequate to meet basic needs. The WHO and World Bank have estimated that half the world’s population don’t have access to basic health services. ‘Leaving no one behind’ is an important ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include, in Target 3.8, by 2030, the aim to “achieve universal health coverage” (UHC). Global health emergencies such as pandemics place an additional huge strain poor countries’ capacity to provide adequate health services. And it is communities facing poverty and people who are already pushed to the margins who face the greatest risks in the global spread of COVID-19.

Global solidarity is needed

Whether it’s a new emergency like COVID-19 or ongoing emergencies such as severe malnutrition, preventable child deaths, or TB, effective and accessible
health systems are essential. COVID-19 is a sobering reminder that we need to increase investment in what we know works: strong international partnerships; health systems that reach everyone; research and development; and prioritising the most marginalised. Partnerships like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance save lives by bringing together the world’s resources to contributing to stronger health systems for all. But as the current situation makes clear, there is much more to do, and international solidarity is needed more than ever.

Infectious diseases don’t respect national borders, and so a global health emergency demands a global response. Health systems will need significant coordinated investment to help combat the pandemic and to prevent millions of deaths. World leaders must grasp this moment to ensure that we emerge from the pandemic with stronger health systems, working in partnership with developing countries so that we are all safer during future health emergencies. We must be more ambitious than ever in our investments and our commitment.

The UK’s role in global health

On 26 March, the G20 meeting of world leaders committed to do “whatever it takes” to minimise the social and economic damage of COVID-19. Their statement described the pandemic as “a powerful reminder of our interconnectedness and vulnerabilities.” At that meeting, the UK Government pledged £210 million for the search for a vaccine for COVID-19 and new funding to accelerate production of tests for the virus. New International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said: “We are backing experts, including in the UK, to find solutions as quickly as possible to this pandemic. This will ultimately help us to save lives in this country.” She now has one of the most important jobs in government, with a big role in continuing the UK’s leadership in global health. The UK should be applauded for its ongoing support to global health, such as last year’s funding for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria; its imminent hosting of the Global Vaccine Summit (3 June 2020) to replenish Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and its significant contributions to R&D into global health.

It is vital that, as well as protecting the UK public directly, the Government also contributes generously to efforts to support the COVID-19 response in poorer countries and to help us all develop resilience to future disease outbreaks. In addition to the recent R&D funding announcement, it will remain vital for the UK to continue to increase its global health investments – in Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and in the ‘Nutrition for Growth’ agenda, which both need new funding in 2020.

This month, at a time of intense concern over public health, we are asking RESULTS group members to collaborate virtually to write joint group letters, welcoming the Secretary of State to her new role and to encourage her to continue the UK’s focus on global health – both to respond to COVID-19 and to ensure a continued focus on ongoing health priorities.

This month’s Background Sheet includes suggestions for your group’s letter. As Parliament is not expected to reconvene until 21 April at the earliest, your voice is particularly important right now as a way to encourage the Government to show solidarity with poorer countries on global health. And please do stay in touch with each other even while you can’t meet physically, and support each other at this difficult time.

Ways to take action this month:

1. Write a letter to the Secretary of State from your RESULTS group, welcoming her to her role and encouraging her to prioritise the UK’s investments in global health at such a critical time. This will include new funding for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the ‘Nutrition for Growth’ agenda and R&D for global health, as well as the COVID-19 response.

   **Contact details:** Rt. Hon. Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, Secretary of State for International Development, 22 Whitehall, London SW1A 2EG. Email: [DFIDCorrespondence@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:DFIDCorrespondence@dfid.gov.uk)

2. Work as a group to support each other during the current crisis. Background Sheet gives some suggestions for how you might want to use technology to help do this.

Let us know that you’ve taken action by emailing Dela at [dela.anderson@results.org.uk](mailto:dela.anderson@results.org.uk).