

Country engagement: An essential pathway to success

When health initiatives are responsive to people's and countries' needs, adapted to local contexts, and aligned with national and regional priorities, pilot interventions quickly transform into national practice, driving sustainable improvements for health.

Unitaid has led meaningful country engagement efforts since our inception, and these practices have played a central role in our success. As set out in our 2023–2027 Strategy, country stakeholder engagement is foundational to our model, ensuring that innovations are co-created with countries and grounded in real-world constraints and priorities. Our approach uses time-bound interventions that help countries switch to more effective, easy-to-use health products, suitable for community and primary health care settings. We also make these products affordable through price negotiations, generic market development, and licensing agreements to promote competition.

This is where Unitaid adds particular value to national health financing: lower product costs and reduced clinic and hospital visits free up resources, make limited health budgets stretch further, and generate savings – an approach that is increasingly

critical as international aid funding declines and as countries face mounting economic pressures.

Building on this history and in response to the changes in global health funding, we are strengthening our collaboration with low- and middle-income countries to empower and invest directly in local systems and partners, ensure our investments are aligned with country plans, build local capacity, and have government support to accelerate health sovereignty and improve health for all.

This deepened partnership approach reflects a core commitment of our current strategy: enabling countries to drive the introduction, scale-up, and sustainability of health innovations, especially in an era where resilient, country-owned solutions are more essential than ever.



How we work

At Unitaid, we save lives by making health innovations available and affordable for people in low- and middle-income countries. We identify innovative treatments and tools, help tackle the market barriers that are holding them back and get them to the people who need them – fast.

Working alongside our government counterparts and country partners, including communities, we jointly shape priorities, design interventions and plan for adoption and scale up. We ensure that innovations are aligned, appropriate and embedded within country systems from the outset.

Through this work we aim to:

- **Strengthen the involvement of country stakeholders in our efforts to introduce new, affordable, and accessible health products that align with national priorities and community needs.**
- **Foster local ownership and co-investment from low- and middle-income countries to enhance the scale-up and sustainability of interventions we support.**
- **Build local capabilities by increasingly working with South-based implementers, supporting research institutions, promoting regional manufacturing, and advancing country-led innovations to ensure that health solutions are both effective and sustainable.**

Regional solutions for medical oxygen supplies in East Africa:

Medical oxygen is a lifesaving treatment with no substitute, critical for conditions like pneumonia, childbirth complications, preterm birth, severe malaria, and advanced HIV. Yet many hospitals across sub-Saharan Africa access only a fraction of what they need, often relying on bulky, costly cylinders that can leak, are vulnerable to theft, and must be carried by hand to patients' bedsides. In under-resourced clinics, multiple patients may share a single cylinder without proper flow meters – risking underdosing, oxygen toxicity, or even death.

In East Africa, we set out to address these shortages, working with governments to identify their priorities while engaging industry partners best suited to meet the needs of both parties. This led to the establishment of the East African Program on Oxygen Access, a regional investment where governments play a central coordinating role in building a production and distribution network for liquid oxygen – which can be produced efficiently in large volumes off site, stored in bulk tanks at health care facilities and delivered to the bedside through piping.

We drew market-based solutions to production and supply challenges from local companies, bringing private sector actors with technical expertise and local knowledge directly into the health ecosystem, fostering innovation and sustainable market participation. Governments identify priority geographies, convene technical committees and coordinate partners to align investments with national oxygen roadmaps.

Regional manufacturing, multi-year contracting and co-investment by private operators ensures assets become permanent components of national health infrastructure. Ministries of Health now benefit from predictable, quality-assured supply networks that reach district and regional hospitals.

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This project will improve the availability of medical oxygen across the country, reaching even district-level facilities. It will reduce deaths caused by respiratory diseases, including maternal deaths, ultimately saving the lives of women and children in our country.

Kassim Majaliwa
Tanzania's Prime Minister

This model is already inspiring replication in additional geographies, as we seek to build additional programs to serve the needs of West and Central Africa. Tanzania's Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa has welcomed this shift.

Bespoke approaches to cervical cancer elimination in the Philippines and Rwanda:

The global effort to eliminate cervical cancer shows just how powerful country engagement can be when national leadership, community trust, and evidence-based tools come together. In response to the WHO Director-General's call to action in 2018, we launched a portfolio of investments in secondary prevention, with a strong focus on political commitment and domestic investment so countries could build their own sustainable, locally driven solutions. This approach has yielded remarkable results, particularly in the Philippines and Rwanda – two countries demonstrating how local ownership accelerates progress.

In the Philippines, strong leadership from the Department of Health, coupled with active civil society engagement, shaped a model tailored to a 7,000-island nation. By expanding mobile outreach, empowering frontline workers, introducing self-sampling, and improving referral and data systems, the country is ensuring women in even the most remote areas can access timely screening and treatment.

Rwanda, long committed to cervical cancer prevention, leveraged our support to integrate affordable HPV testing, community-based self-sampling, portable treatment technologies, and digital patient tracking into its already robust health system anchored by 60,000 community health workers. Through country-led planning, market shaping and system strengthening, Rwanda secured major price reductions for screening and built real-time monitoring capability.

Both countries have taken major steps to ensure program sustainability: HPV tests are now covered

Negotiations have lowered the price of 3HP to less than US\$15 per course – enabling national procurement and rollout.

under Rwanda's community-based health insurance scheme, and the Philippines recently committed national funds for HPV testing. Together, the Philippines and Rwanda show that elimination is achievable when countries lead the way, shaping strategies that reflect their context and priorities while benefitting from catalytic global support.

The right price for access: TB prevention in Brazil and South Africa:

When newer, shorter, and safer TB prevention regimens called 3HP and 1HP were introduced, their high cost made large-scale rollout unrealistic for most countries. To change this, we partnered with the South African National TB Program and the Brazilian Ministry of Health to support simplified, accessible, quality-assured preventive treatment. By securing sufficient purchase volumes, we achieved an initial 75% price reduction for the 3HP regimen.

Government leadership was central to sustaining progress. As national programs implemented 3HP, we were able to expand manufacturing, generate evidence for broader adoption, and improve access in low- and middle-income countries. Through IMPAACT4TB, we pooled demand and procurement with major partners, including the Government of South Africa, the Global Fund, PEPFAR, and USAID whose consistent engagement was vital to successful market-shaping.

Today, both governments fully own their 3HP programs. South Africa includes 3HP in national guidelines, funds it domestically, and procures it through the essential medicines list. Brazil manages nationwide delivery, supports implementation research, and is exploring future local production of key medicines.



Furthering manufacturing in sub-Saharan

Africa: Africa imports nearly all its essential health products, leaving countries vulnerable to being cut off from lifesaving commodities if global demand spikes, as was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our work responds to that gap and by strengthening health sovereignty, while stimulating economic development and reducing reliance on external forces.

Early, structured engagement with countries is creating solutions that are responsive, sustainable and regionally owned. From the outset, we engaged with several governments, including South Africa, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, among others, in our investment design process, working alongside African Union bodies and Regional Economic Communities, as well as global health organizations.

By co-designing programs, we ensure our investments reflect locally defined priorities and strengthen countries' ability to lead long-term transformation of their manufacturing industries – ensuring innovations we support endure long after our investments end.

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The shift from dependency to resilience won't happen overnight but it is under way. As countries such as Nigeria pave the way, partners should follow with humility, alignment, and purpose.

Muhammad Ali Pate

Minister of Health of Nigeria

From an op-ed co-authored with

Dr. Philippe Duneton, Executive Director of Unitaid



Looking ahead

As low- and middle-income countries face mounting challenges in the face of dwindling resources, collaborative approaches are more important than ever. We are committed to providing cost-saving and easy-to-use health products through deeper and more systematic engagement.

We will continue to work with country stakeholders to advance locally defined priorities, introduce locally owned innovation solutions and help establish the ecosystem needed to achieve and sustain positive impacts beyond the investment lifecycle. We will aim to increase our support for country-led initiatives and South-South learning while increasing our cooperation and coordination with regional bodies and national governments in support of global health goals and the scale-up of life-saving health products.

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About Unitaid:

We save lives by making new health products available and affordable for people in low- and middle-income countries. We work with partners to identify innovative treatments, tests and tools, help tackle the market barriers that are holding them back, and get them to the people who need them most – fast. Since we were created in 2006, we have unlocked access to more than 100 groundbreaking health products to help address the world's biggest health challenges, including HIV, TB, and malaria; women's and children's health; and pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. Every year, more than 300 million people benefit from the products we've helped roll out.

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