ACTaccelerator
ACCESS TO COVID-19 TOOLS

Statement of the Co-Chairs of the 4th ACT Accelerator Facilitation Council, 9 February 2021

The global pandemic poses an unprecedented threat, extending beyond a global health crisis to an economic, humanitarian, health security and human rights crisis. As of mid-January, COVID-19 has claimed more than 2.3 million lives and infected more than 105 million people worldwide. Emerging variants of the virus are heightening concerns and underscoring the need for a swifter global response.

Set up in response to a call from G20 leaders in March 2020, the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator has since then:

- Secured US$ 6 billion in funding, with an additional US$ 4 billion in the pipeline
- COVAX is on track to hit its target of 2 billion doses of vaccine supply in 2021, having assembled a promising portfolio of vaccine candidates, and is laying the groundwork for additional doses.
- Realized multiple new Rapid Diagnostic Tests to allow for faster isolation and contact tracing and care/treatment, recently announced at half the original procurement cost/unit.
- Researched and procured Dexamethasone, the only effective pharmaceutical treatment for severe COVID-19, while continuing research on other therapeutics.
- Supported health systems by facilitating country readiness assessments for the rapid uptake for COVID-19 tools and established a common knowledge platform for countries to share the country-level knowhow and best practices of health systems strengthening to respond to COVID-19.

All of this has been achieved through unprecedented collaboration by leading international public health organizations, repurposing their work to attack COVID-19 through the fast-track development and equitable distribution of new countermeasures.

Yet the COVID-19 pandemic undeniably continues to wreak havoc and further work needs to be done to address it.

There is an urgent need to do more

The arrival of vaccines has brought great optimism. However, Sars-CoV-2 is proving to be a complex and adaptive foe - an evolving virus that could weaken or neutralize the impact of the COVID-19 tools we've worked so hard to develop. So, we need even greater partnership rather than a fragmented approach, which is source of concern to us.

Today's Council meeting discussed the ACT-A Prioritized Strategy & Budget which has been developed to address this changing global context. It was encouraging to see that the ACT-Accelerator's four Strategic Priorities for 2021 address the evolving COVID-19 crisis by, inter alia:

1. Rapidly scaling-up the delivery of 2+ billion doses of vaccines
2. Bolstering R&D, product evaluations & regulatory pathways to optimize products and address new viral variants
3. Stimulating rapid and effective uptake of COVID-19 tests, treatments and PPE
4. Ensuring a robust pipeline of essential tests, treatments and PPE

Our collective promise to the world is at risk: accelerating fair and equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines is not an altruistic principle- it is the fastest and safest way to get the world out of the pandemic, together.

Whilst the ACT-Accelerator, through COVAX, is ramping up to distribute promised vaccines, we are scoring poorly on equity and want to see greater engagement by industry to help us find and operationalize solutions. The world does not need another situation like we saw with a lag in time for low income countries to access HIV treatments. The time for global solidarity is now. COVID-19 does not respect national boundaries**.** We therefore need to ensure regulatory approval for all markets, value for

money and fair pricing for the collectively purchased products, collaborative efforts and partnership arrangements to expand production capacities, in particular for vaccines, and better oversight, coordination and rapid roll out of products.

Turning political words into financing commitments

We thank all financially contributing countries for the considerable commitments made to the ACT Accelerator. We welcome that the United States of America is joining the ACT Accelerator and supporting COVAX. We look forward to stronger engagement with the United States. Japan's announcement at the 4th Council for further support is also much appreciated.

We call on our peers in Governments, including Ministers of Finance, who now have taken an important responsibility across the world, and the private sector including investors, manufacturers and philanthropists, to further embrace and support the multilateral approach to enable a fast end to this pandemic.

With the worrying dangers posed by supply shortages, inadequate financing, and new virus variants threatening the efficacy of current tools and vaccines, it is clear that the crisis is not over. Investing in measures that will control the pandemic can be seen as a type of fiscal stimulus. And, one with a greater multiplier than cash directed to hard hit companies and individuals.

We ask for strong political leadership and solidarity, to bridge the equity gap and bring together our financial, scientific, industrial and manufacturing capacities, to bring the acute phase of the pandemic to an end as rapidly as possible. An extraordinary fiscal response is needed through investment in health tools using fiscal stimulus, not draining existing development or health budget streams, and filling the $US 27.2 billion financing gap of the ACT-Accelerator.

The Minister of Development from Norway, Mr Dag-Inge Ulstein, concluded that: Quote: “The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed suffering and economic crises of historic proportions. Strong determination and “out-of-the-box” thinking are required, and as the virus accelerates and new variants emerge, suppressing its spread has never been more urgent. The high-level meeting between G20 and OECD finance ministries on how to collectively resolve the global economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is an important step in the right direction. There is a global moral imperative to work collaboratively to improve expedited access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines, across countries of all income levels to prevent as many deaths as possible and restart economies.”

Dr Zweli Mkhize, Minister of Health, South Africa, concluded that: “We are very encouraged to see the amount of resources mobilization that has occurred to support the pillars of the ACT-Accelerator. This pandemic has not only shown us the value of meaningful and sincere partnerships but we have also been shown the socio-economic devastation caused by unequal access to health care. As we have been told many times, solidarity in health care is not only the right approach, it is also the smart thing to do. I too wish to commend the closer working relationships that have been forged through various platforms between Ministers of Health and Finance. Finally, let us not forget to ensure that the health systems strengthening pillar of the Accelerator is well attended to and that we take our communities along with us in meaningful partnership. A truly collaborative effort will ensure that we prevail over COVID-19”.