ACTaccelerator
ACCESS TO COVID-19 TOOLS

Hosted by World Health Organization

JUNE 2022

INVESTING IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE THROUGH THE ACT-ACCELERATOR: LONG TERM BENEFITS

Investing in the work of ACT-Accelerator agencies will not only address the immediate COVID-19 pandemic, but will have long-lasting outcomes. As well as increasing access to the tools needed to end the pandemic, the partnership is helping countries to build laboratory capacity and enhance the cold chain, create and maintain oxygen systems, train healthcare workers, and pilot roll-out of test and treat protocols in communities.

It also supports global and regional health security by facilitating routine immunization and disease diagnosis beyond COVID-19, including vaccine, medicines and diagnostics production in many LICs and LMICs.

Here are some key investments in the global COVID-19 response through the ACT-Accelerator that will have long term benefits.

CREDIT: WHO

1.OXYGEN INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION AND MAINTENANCE

Oxygen is critical to all health systems and is the most cost-effective intervention against child pneumonia, as well as being essential for treating trauma and TB patients, and women who develop complications in childbirth.

Access to oxygen at health facilities is an element of the health system package of essential health services that allows progress towards universal health coverage. The COVID-19 Oxygen Emergency Taskforce, part of the ACT-Accelerator Therapeutics pillar, has negotiated unprecedented deals with the world's largest oxygen suppliers to increase access in more than 120 LMICs – transforming the liquid oxygen landscape globally. To establish a sustainable source of medical oxygen in LMICs, UNICEF developed the first complex Oxygen Plant System (Plant-in-a-Box) to produce large volumes of medical-grade oxygen for patients and has now procured 44 Oxygen Plant-in-a-Box packages in 30 countries. Furthermore, a joint effort by taskforce partners has seen more than 120 PSA plants repaired, putting vital broken equipment back into use.

CREDIT: CHAI

2. BUILDING COLD CHAIN CAPACITY

Improving cold chain capacity expands the range of vaccines and treatments that countries can use to treat COVID-19 patients and beyond, and extends access to more facilities, supporting universal health coverage.

The vaccines pillar has provided more than US$ 51.5m to close cold chain capacity gaps in 74 countries with refrigerators, freezers, cold rooms and passive devices. In addition, COVAX has supported the installation of 174 Ultra Low Temperature (ULT) cold chain devices in 19 countries and a further 68 ULTs are in the process of being installed in 10 additional countries. This is helping to scale-up and scale-out vaccine manufacturing, especially in underserved geographies. Further complementary investment in the maintenance of this infrastructure is required to ensure sustainability. This will not only facilitate access to urgently needed COVID-19 vaccines in the medium term, but with additional investment in maintenance and sustainability, it will also build the foundations to enable access to other vaccines in the future.

CREDIT: UNICEF Ethiopia

3. HEALTH WORKFORCE STRENGTHENING

The ACT-Accelerator has facilitated training of hundreds of thousands of health workers, upskilling current members of the workforce and training new ones. This includes frontline workers, as well as specialists in stock management, digital technologies, data management and finance.

In Ethiopia, 5,000 surge workers brought in to address the pandemic will now stay on to support with other primary healthcare activities and strengthen overall capacities. Building stronger public health systems with adequately trained and resourced staff is fundamental to ensuring greater pandemic preparedness in the future.

CREDIT: WHO

4. BUILDING SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

Extending surveillance systems and integrating them into routine surveillance and information systems supports universal health coverage and health systems strengthening.

In India, FIND partnered with the Institute of Genomics and Integrated Biology (CSIR-IGIB) to decentralize genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2, down to the district level, by setting up "MicroLabs" that enable sequencing, analysis and interpretation of sequencing data with minimal turnaround time in places with limited infrastructure. The ACT-Accelerator helped build the capacity to expand the use of next-generation sequencing for genomic surveillance in Southern Africa, which enabled the early detection of the Omicron variant. Building sequencing capacity improves outbreak response and bolsters both short- and long-term pandemic preparedness and global health security.

CREDIT: FIND

5. LOCAL MANUFACTURING AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Coordinated action by ACT-Accelerator agencies and others is improving the global supply chain to enable faster, more equitable access to vaccines, tests, and treatments, both for COVID-19 and beyond.

The ACT-A COVAX Manufacturing Task Force supplied more than 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the AMC 92 countries which are predominantly LMICs. The challenges experienced resulted in changes to global free-flow of goods processes, creation of a marketplace for consumables for COVID-19 vaccine manufacture and empowered recognition of the need for regional vaccine manufacturing, particularly for underserved global populations.

The ACT-Accelerator has contributed to setting up the first mRNA technology transfer hub in South Africa – already providing mRNA technology transfers to Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia.

Licensing COVID-19 treatments through ACT-Accelerator partner, Medicine Patent Pool (MPP), may strengthen local supply chains, and is laying a solid foundation for improving access to therapeutics in the long-term. For example, a voluntary licensing agreement for Pfizer's COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment, Paxlovid, will help supply 95 LICs and LMICs.

Investments in scaled-up manufacturing of tests and high-volume manufacturing agreements through the ACT-Accelerator have improved supply and brought prices for Ag RDT tests down to under US$ 2.50. Furthermore, manufacturing sites that have been brought online to supply these tests will also be able to produce diagnostics for a range of diseases in the future, including HIV and TB.

6.BETTER TOOLS AND SYSTEMS DEVELOPED FOR THE COVID-19 RESPONSE CAN BE APPLIED MORE BROADLY TO EXTEND UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE AND TO SUPPORT GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY

The ACT-Accelerator has succeeded in accelerating the development of tools such as vaccines and tests in record time. Products in the pipeline like multiplex diagnostics tools will facilitate testing for several diseases at once, quickly, affordably, and without sophisticated laboratory equipment. This will transform healthcare at community level by empowering health workers to rapidly and accurately diagnose and treat patients who may be suffering from COVID-19 or several other diseases.

In addition, countries are using COVID-19 response funding to make urgent improvements to health and community systems to fight the pandemic, as well as to improve health systems. As of April 1, 2022 the Global Fund had raised US$ 4.2 billion for the COVID-19 Response Mechanism. Recipient countries have used 13% of the funding available to make urgent improvements to health and community systems to help fight COVID-19, as well as HIV, TB and malaria, by reinforcing supply chains, laboratory networks and community-led response systems. The systems and tools to address these preventable diseases are also foundational to fighting health emergencies in the future.

The ACT-Accelerator is the only mechanism that brings together all major global health players across all COVID-19 tools synergistically, with a proven track record in delivering results for equitable access to COVID-19 tools. ACT-Accelerator agencies have delivered 82% of vaccine doses to LICs, 44% to LMICs, as well as 67% of tests performed in Africa. Working together, these agencies can support national governments to scale-up roll out of COVID-19 tools, while also laying the foundation for stronger systems of pandemic preparedness and response.

A fully funded ACT-Accelerator will strengthen health systems, boost universal health coverage, enhance global health security, protect the economy, help prepare for future pandemics, and saves lives. Investment in ACT-A must be complemented with further investment in health systems strengthening, particularly in countries lagging behind in progress towards universal health coverage, in order to ensure that they can implement countermeasures in health emergencies. To end the pandemic, we must fully finance the ACT-Accelerator.