

SESSION KEY TAKEAWAYS

Promoting health equity through improved access to lifesaving medicines and medical countermeasures in low- and middle-income countries

On 28 May 2024, along the sidelines of the 77th World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva, the Access to Medicine Foundation and the World Economic Forum (WEF) organised a high-level roundtable to discuss the strategies aimed at enhancing equitable access to essential medicines and medical countermeasures (MCMs) globally.

Held under Chatham House Rules, almost 30 high-level participants joined this interactive discussion, including CEOs, leaders and leading experts involved in developing and/or producing medicines, policymakers from government, non-profit implementing organisations and regulators. Several leading manufacturers based in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) also attended and articulated their readiness to join forces to address the problem of access and build health system resilience to withstand future shocks.

The participants shared insights and solutions towards strengthening equitable access and supply of essential medicines and MCMs in LMICs.

1. The Foundation and WEF calls to action

We invite you to review the following outputs of the 2024 meeting as each party's commitment to equity in access to medicines.

1.1 For public sector (government, policymakers, civil society, and non-governmental agencies)

- Establish cross-country and/or regional collaborations to facilitate private investments and operations, harmonised regulatory pathways to streamline processes and facilitate access, manufacturing, registration, purchasing, and coordinated procurement processes and data sharing.
- Invest in capacity building and health systems strengthening initiatives to make them more impactful.
- Implement sustainable financing mechanisms and initiatives involving finance, tax and innovation for equitable healthcare access.
- Prioritise clinical trial diversity to ensure representative outcomes, as well as ensuring accessibility, particularly in LMICs.
- Promote collaboration and partnerships between private and public sectors, including involvement of local communities, to address healthcare disparities to ensure sustainability and longer-term durability.

1.2 For private sector (manufacturers)

- Expand local manufacturing capabilities through collaboration with other manufacturers and public sectors to overcome regulatory hurdles, enhance supply chain resilience and build resource capacity for essential medicines and MCMs.
- Engage in public-private partnerships to support and maximise access initiatives and regional innovations, including sustainable financing and promoting technical transfers.
- Customise strategies to maximise innovation and access while maintaining flexibility, considering both economic sustainability and environmental responsibility.

- Invest in research and development for products fit for resource-constrained environments.
- Deploy alternative financing and shared value partnerships to de-risk commercialisation of products.
- Ensure accountability and sustainability in access programmes.

1.3 For procurers

- Ensure the development and maintenance of healthy markets, which include aspects such as financing, procurement, predictable demand, and the capability to move products across borders.
- Leverage the pooled procurement mechanisms of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, provide its listed products with expedited market access, which may allow countries to waive market registration requirements.

1.4 For regulatory authorities

- Facilitate regulatory harmonisation efforts to streamline approvals and ensure quality.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to address knowledge and capacity gaps in regulation.
- Implement frameworks to support access initiatives, including the availability of data to support artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning advancements to prioritise all sectors of public health needs.
- Strengthen surveillance and laboratory systems to ensure product quality and safety.
- Support sustainable financing mechanisms and innovative approaches to regulation.

2. High-level themes

In addition to the above action items, key high-level themes from the discussion are described below.

2.1 Regulatory harmonisation

Participants highlighted the importance of regulatory harmony as a critical element for improving access to medicines and medical countermeasures in LMICs. Harmonised regulatory pathways can streamline processes and facilitate manufacturing, registration, and procurement. Additionally, regulatory authorities must strengthen surveillance and laboratory systems to ensure product quality and safety while supporting sustainable financing mechanisms and innovative regulatory approaches.

2.2 Broadening access through innovation and partnerships

New ways to broaden access to medicines, highlighting recent developments and potential partnerships were discussed. Several companies shared their recent developments and their progress in developing innovative solutions that tailored to the needs of LMICs. Companies expressed their willingness to partner with public sector entities, local manufacturers, and international organisations to scale these innovations. Public-private partnerships were seen as essential to facilitating partnerships to support regional operations. Initiatives incorporating the availability of quality data to support AI and machine learning advancements can enable business opportunities to meet supply and demand, especially for disease surveillance, emergency pandemic preparedness and climate change.

2.3 Capacity building and health systems strengthening

Attendees emphasised the need for capacity building initiatives that enhance the capabilities of regulatory authorities and healthcare systems for ensuring equitable access to medicines. Examples include evaluating and maximising knowledge, production and innovation structures. The need to establish a balance between innovation and access was also noted, with attendees emphasising that a 'one-size-fits-all strategy' approach does not work. Instead, pharmaceutical companies need to individually customise strategies with flexible frameworks in order to collectively work together in ensuring support for access. Furthermore, facilitating knowledge transfer and collaboration to strengthen regulatory frameworks will support access initiatives and prioritise public health needs.

2.4 Sustainable financing

Sustainable financing mechanisms were mentioned as crucial for equitable healthcare access in LMICs. Implementing these mechanisms involves innovative approaches, such as finance, tax, and shared-value partnerships. Participants discussed the need for more engagement between public-private partnerships to support and maximise access initiatives and regional innovations. In addition to the promotion of initiatives, the evaluation of their impact through connecting with local communities was emphasised as a critical step. This includes initiatives implemented away from the 'out-of-pocket model', prioritising affordability, availability, and sustainability of essential medicines. Promoting collaboration between private and public sectors, including local communities, will help address healthcare disparities and ensure sustainability and longer-term durability.

2.5 Early access planning in a diverse and equitable way

Ensuring early access to medicines through diverse and equitable planning is essential for achieving representative outcomes and accessibility, particularly in LMICs. Participants emphasised the need to prioritise clinical trial diversity into the planning stages to ensure that outcomes are representative of diverse populations. Fostering collaborations between government organisations and industry will also ensure better efficiency and execution of clinical trials, especially in resource-constrained environments.