

CALL TO ACTION: Communities' access to quality affordable suitable effective diagnostics

Remarks of the Diagnostic Equity Consortium (DEC) at the
ASLM Special Convention on Diagnostics

7 Nov 2024, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

The dire lack of essential diagnostics in low- and middle-income countries was noted in the Lancet Commission on Diagnostics which concluded that an estimated 47% of the global population has little to no access to diagnostics. This inequality impacts the Africa population severely. The Diagnostic Equity Consortium (DEC) is a civil society-led movement advocating for the scale up access to essential diagnostics to address this deadly gap.

The DEC has noted the quantum leap in the development of new diagnostics tools and strategies, especially in the field of TB, which have the potential of reaching the diagnostics coverage targets in the UN High Level Meeting on TB that African countries agreed to. We are also heartened by African member state endorsement of the World Health Assembly 2023 Resolution on expanding national diagnostic networks' capacity. Further, we are encouraged by the momentum aimed at scaling up access to diagnostics in the region and we applaud the ASLM for its leadership, convenings, and technical support to countries.

There has never been a better moment for moving the diagnostics agenda forward. And yet, we still witness African governments not prioritising funding and resources for national diagnostics networks. Although it is more than 20 years of providing HIV treatment in the public sector, the lack of integration at the health facilities and labs and vertical disease siloes continues to persist. It is remarkable that in 2024, donors-support programs haven't fully integrated sample collection and transportation.

We are happy to hear more rhetoric about person-centred testing, but we don't see the changes necessary to reduce the burden on populations, including digitally sending lab results to patients, decentralizing testing, embracing self-administered testing as a goal, eliminating out of pocket costs, and ensuring essential diagnostics are covered by national health insurance schemes. We also note, with concern, high local distributor markups and cost-prohibitive supply and maintenance contracts, both of which adversely affect the costs and availability of tests.

Even more concerning is the little to zero role of civil society and communities in planning and decision-making on diagnostics at country level.

We therefore call upon all laboratory directors here present, or their representatives, to strive to meet commitments in the WHA Diagnostics resolution. At the very least, countries should develop national essential diagnostics list (EDL) and national diagnostic strategic plans – across diseases. This is not your national laboratory plan. This is a plan to expand availability of essential tests to the PHC and secondary levels of care.

We also call upon laboratory directors and MOH programme directors to consult with civil society representatives and communities. Afterall, we are your best chance towards increasing awareness, literacy, demand, and uptake of the tests we have. We are also your best chance to successful for advocacy for affordable, suitable, and effective for the tests and supplies we need at all levels of care.

For TB specifically, we call upon countries to prepare and plan now for the introduction and rollout of new and innovative point-of-care and/or near PoC diagnostics, once out of the pipeline.

Decisions on the placement and distribution of these new tools along with molecular platforms within national diagnostics networks must be based on **proximity**- given the importance of decentralization, **urgency**-given the number of needless TB deaths, and **opportunity** to benefit TB as well other health issues through multiplex testing.

As civil society and communities, we want to help government develop rollout plans for new place point-of-care and/or near PoC test to reach every primary healthcare centre. We want to help government develop rollout plans for new lower complexity molecular TB diagnostics, preferably multiplex, at every secondary health care level facility. We ask that NTPs and National Lab Directors convene national forum/consultations to co-develop these plans.

In order to secure a negotiated affordable price from industry, we must be ambitious in our planning. High demand, high ambition, and high volumes will result in a more affordable price that otherwise we would only get in the future should we go low and slow in our rollout. We need to bring this future affordable price forward to the present.

Please also keep in mind that the pipeline includes robust alternatives to the GenXpert's monopoly, so governments will have more options to choose from based on the needs of its population and capacity of its network.

We call upon industry to provide and global health actors to ensure: one, licensing of these promising technologies and tech transfer to allow for regional manufacturing; two, transparency of pricing of diagnostic tools and related commodities; and three, an industry forum so that African governments and civil society have the chance to communicate research and develop gaps based on health needs outside of AIDS, TB, and malaria and collectively address the local distributors' high markups and unfulfilled service and maintenance contracts.

Civil society, for our part, commits itself to increase diagnostics literacy among at the community level, prepare our communities for new diagnostics to improve demand and uptake, and relaying communities' experiences and needs to duty bearers, including national lab directors, MOH program leads, Global Fund CCMs, global health actors, donors, and industry.

Please know the Diagnostics Equity Consortium are your allies, committed to working with and holding to account all partners in ensuring that communities are able to access quality affordable suitable effective diagnostics on a sustainable basis.

Delivered by Tapiwa Kujinga, Executive Director, Pan-African Treatment Access Movement (PATAM), and cohost of the Diagnostics Equity Consortium, at the plenary session of the ASLM Special Convention on Diagnostics, 7 November 2025, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

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