

ACTION SHEET

Write a Letter to the Editor: Call on Congress to Include Global Health & Education in the U.S. Emergency COVID-19 Response

As the world continues to grapple with the most significant global pandemic threat in a century, the United States continues its emergency response efforts. We must ensure that, while mitigating the effects of COVID-19 in the U.S., the U.S. emergency response includes protecting hard-fought gains in global health and education in low-income, partner countries. Many nations are already facing poverty and living on the margins—they face the greatest risk. And it's not just the direct effects of COVID-19 that are of concern, it's the impact on other health services, education, and the economic toll COVID-19 will take on fragile economies. They must be included in the U.S. response. Here's why.

We've heard from our partners that:

- Mosquito bed net distribution campaigns to prevent malaria are at risk of being cancelled in nearly 20 countries, just as the malaria season is about to begin in West Africa.
- Reporting of tuberculosis cases in India has plummeted by 80 percent as laboratory capacity and health care workers are mustered to respond to COVID-19.
- People living with HIV/AIDS, who rely on anti-retroviral medicine to survive, are threatened by interruption of their drug supply.
- Immunization programs for life-saving polio, measles, and other vaccines are being suspended as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance balances these critical programs with the risk of coronavirus exposure in public immunization settings.

Sub-Saharan Africa may be particularly vulnerable. The majority of countries rated “least prepared” to respond by the [Global Health Security Index](#) are in Africa. While a warmer and more humid climate, a younger population, and more recent experience confronting epidemics may prove to be protective factors, there are many challenges that may exacerbate the toll of COVID-19. These include:

- Higher rates of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malnutrition, and other serious underlying health conditions,
- Difficulty implementing social distancing in crowded urban settings,
- Lack of access to clean water and sanitation,
- Critical shortages of health workers, and
- Limited capacity to detect and treat COVID-19 patients. *Kenya, for example, has just 155 intensive care beds in public hospitals in a country of 50 million people.*

An urgent concern is not just the direct toll from COVID-19, but the impact on other disease-fighting efforts as health workers mobilize to confront COVID-19. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, there were over 10,000 additional deaths from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, and up to 16,000 additional child deaths from measles as 1 million children missed out on vaccinations for the disease.

We are particularly concerned about the interaction between COVID-19 and tuberculosis. People with TB may be more likely to get sick with COVID-19, and many of the resources required to fight TB—lab capacity for diagnosis, health care workers to do contact tracing, etc.—will be needed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the impacts on health, there is widespread disruption of education. [More than 90 percent of the world's students are affected by school closures](#). Existing disparities in access to quality education will be exacerbated as schools closed given distance learning options are limited in the majority of low-income nations.

Take Your Message to Your Local Media

Generate media and support others to get published. The media will be a critical influencer as Congress makes its next decisions on the COVID-19 response. Use [our online action](#) or the template below to write. Also, engage others in your network through virtual letter-to-the-editor writing workshops (see the sample meeting outline below).

Sample letter to the editor

Engage: As the world faces the greatest global pandemic in a century, the US response must be comprehensive. In addition to a robust emergency response for the US, Congress must also remember our partners in low-income countries.

Problem: With our support, we've helped low-income partner nations make great progress on child health, diseases, and education. But progress is precarious and COVID-19 is already compromising basic vaccination services, education, and access for testing and treatment of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. And hunger and malnutrition are a growing threat.

Inform: The US should lean on effective international organizations with proven impact like Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria to aid with the response.

Call to Action: Rep. _____ and Senators _____ and _____ should write and speak to House and Senate leadership to ensure that the COVID-19 emergency response includes support for global health and education in low-income partner nations. This is the humane thing to do, and it will help us all in the long-term.

Virtual Letter-to-the-Editor Writing Workshop Agenda

If you could use assistance in arranging technology for a virtual meeting, contact us at grassroots@results.org. In preparing for your meeting, distribute materials – including the May Action Sheet - electronically or do a screen-share in your online platform. Let people know that they will be writing letters so they can be ready with whatever equipment (pen/paper, laptop, tablet) they need. Also, consider delegating pieces of the agenda ahead of time with members of your group so many voices can take leadership and be heard during the meeting.

Below is a sample agenda and script for putting people in your community into action. When people take action, they get inspired. Adapt the 60-minute agenda below.

I. Setting the Stage – 15 Minutes

2 min: Welcome and acknowledge people for being there.

“There are a lot of ways you could be spending this time, and I want to thank all of you for coming out and learning more about how YOU can play a role in the movement to end poverty. Now we can share a bit about why we’re here.”

3 min: State the purpose of the meeting.

“Our purpose today is to inspire you all about the difference you can make, working with others, to create the political will to end hunger and poverty. In the next few minutes, we’ll . . .

- *Learn a bit about RESULTS, the group organizing this.*
- *Learn about an issue of poverty.*
- *Take powerful action on the issue: we’ll be writing letters to the editor.*
- *And, finally, see who is interested in continuing to make a difference with RESULTS.”*

10 min: Center the group and do introductions.

“Let’s see who has gathered and get in touch with why we are here. Please give us your name and tell us briefly why acting on issue of poverty is important to you.”

“Thank you all for sharing what is important to you. We have a lot in common.”

II. The Basics of RESULTS – 10 Minutes

“RESULTS is movement of passionate, committed, everyday people. Together we use our voices to influence political decisions that will bring an end to poverty. As volunteers, we receive training, support, and inspiration to become skilled advocates. In time, we learn to effectively advise policy makers, guiding them toward decisions that will improve access to health, education, and economic opportunity. Together we realize the incredible power we possess to use our voices to change the world. “You can also [read our Values Statement](#).

1. Share an example of success: Example: *“We protected development assistance for FY20 after the President proposed cutting it by 30%. We worked with Republicans and*

Democrats to help secure the highest number ever of congressional supporters for AIDS, TB, and malaria; global education; and maternal & child health, sending a message to the President that these programs should be protected and strengthened.” You could also read something from [our 40th Anniversary brochure](#).

2. Share a local example of our role in creating change (perhaps a way in which you moved a legislator to take action).
3. A few more details if you have time:
 - *“RESULTS partners meet twice per month to plan and take action.”*
 - *“During one of our meetings, we connect to a national webinar to learn about an issue, learn to speak powerfully, and take action to influence Congress.”* Give an example.
 - *“We also develop plans for influencing our decision makers through face-to-face meetings, the media, and other community actions.”*

III. Issues and Action Component - 30 Minutes

1. Introduce the issue with a story or video about a request area (not an exhaustive list). This can be done through screen-sharing or just read a story aloud.
 - a. *Global Fund:* <https://tinyurl.com/VidforGF>
 - b. *Gavi:* <https://tinyurl.com/VidforGavi>
 - c. *Global Partnership for Education:* <https://tinyurl.com/VidforEd>
2. Read the May Action Sheet together, taking turns paragraph by paragraph - including the sample letter.
3. Utilizing the sample letter as a guide, encourage each participant to write their own letter to the editor.
4. Ask a volunteer to read their letter aloud for positive feedback and encouragement.

IV. Invitation to Attend the Next Meeting & Closing – 5 Minutes

“Lastly, we are planning to have future meetings like this one to guide people in becoming powerful advocates. We’ll continue by following up on the meeting(s) we must decide on next steps to take. Who is interested in joining us again to take our next action?”

Say thank you, capture contact information: name, phone, email, address. Add them to your Action Network list and stay in touch with them. Send contact info to Ken Patterson or Lisa Marchal for the RESULTS national database as part of your group’s Action Network. Your new people will receive actions on a regular basis. They can also sign up [here](#).

Action Network Message

Please take action to ensure that low-income nations don’t get left out of the U.S. emergency COVID-10 response effort. [Write a letter to the editor calling for action](#).