



Independent observer  
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## ADVANCING THE FIGHT AGAINST TB WITH THE EXPERTISE OF THE GLOBAL FUND ADVOCATES NETWORK

Working through the [Global Fund Advocates Network](#) (GFAN), tuberculosis (TB) advocates are looking to strategically advance efforts to combat the disease and take advantage of several key international meetings over the coming 15 months. Advocates are in the process of coordinating an initiative, tentatively known as the TB Working Group, through which GFAN members will offer advice on steps they should take leading up to those meetings to build political momentum and, ultimately, ensure high-level commitments toward ending the TB epidemic.

The meetings include the G20 Summit in Hamburg in July, where the host German government has made fighting anti-microbial resistance – including multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) – a centerpiece of its health agenda; and a Global Ministerial Conference on TB in Moscow in November. The schedule culminates next year in New York with a [United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting](#) on the fight against TB.

“This is a big breakthrough for the world of TB,” said Aaron Oxley, the executive director of [RESULTS UK](#), a grassroots advocacy organization focused on ending global poverty. The organization’s portfolio includes a significant anti-TB program. “There’s a recognition that these are opportunities for the TB community that we’ve never had before.”

GFAN, Oxley said, could be instrumental in enabling TB advocates to make the most of those opportunities.

RESULTS is one of more than 140 members of GFAN, a coalition of civil society organizations primarily dedicated to advocating for full funding of the Global Fund. But GFAN has also organized other high-level

campaigns, including around the 2016 U.N. High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS. Oxley, who is helping to coordinate the TB initiative through GFAN, is hoping his community can tap into that expertise. “We need GFAN members to recognize this opportunity with us,” he said. “HIV groups have fought this fight and understand the mechanisms. The TB community, we haven’t. I think there are so many ways to do it wrong, but we want to make sure we do it right.”

Starting as soon as possible, TB advocates plan to enlist GFAN’s help in crafting their strategy and achieve defined commitments designed to contribute to bringing an end to TB.

“I think it’s important for GFAN, which has got such a huge platform, to really translate the lessons and best practices from HIV into TB,” said Blessi Kumar, CEO of the [Global Coalition of TB Activists](#).

For Oxley, that begins with practical advice on how to most effectively organize an agenda and schedule key meetings with the officials who are organizing the global summits, to ensure that advocates are well positioned to secure commitments and establish future accountability mechanisms.

Oxley said the working group is also looking to GFAN for guidance on lobbying efforts and on how to establish a closer relationship with the office of the president of the U.N. General Assembly. “GFAN has an excellent track record of facilitation,” he said. “They bring people together from all over the world and work through what they want to do to have maximum impact.”

Oxley hopes that the interaction with GFAN, in addition to providing tactical advice, will help the TB community to consider its universe of demands and refine them to distinct, achievable results. “We need everything and the kitchen sink,” he said, while highlighting a few items – new drugs, better implementation of existing tools, and increased psychosocial support for patients. “But what we really want as high-level commitments out of Moscow and New York is something that still needs to be determined. We’ve got to focus down on a small amount of doable things.”

Kumar said she is looking to GFAN to tap into its network and help produce more civil society voices to participate in the discussions leading up to Hamburg, Moscow and, especially, New York. That includes calls for a civil society “hearing” at least five months ahead of the High-Level Meeting on TB, to help inform the agenda that ultimately guides that discussion.

“When the affected community holds people accountable – ministers, elected members of parliament, heads of state – it’s so much more powerful, because it’s a question of life and death,” Kumar said. “But the voice of the affected community has been missing. We’ve only taken a medicalized approach to TB.”

The GFAN initiative is currently in its early stages. An official first call was held in April; and GFAN will announce upcoming meetings shortly that will set a firm path forward.

Meanwhile, officials involved in concurrent efforts to prepare for the upcoming meetings in Hamburg, Moscow and New York are eager to coordinate with the initiative. The [Global TB Caucus](#), a network of more than 2,300 parliamentarians committed to helping end the TB epidemic, is working to generate high-level political pledges ahead of the upcoming meetings. Matt Oliver, who heads the Caucus secretariat, told Aidspace that “we have to work closely with civil society, to make sure that what we’re doing aligns with what everyone else is doing and that there’s no slippage.”

The advocates said that, given some worrying global TB trends, there is additional pressure to ensure that the meetings generate significant commitments.

Responsible for 1.8 million deaths in 2015 ([according](#) to the World Health Organization), TB is currently the leading infectious killer in the world. Drug-resistant strains of the disease, which are more expensive and time-consuming to treat, are on the rise. New research published this month in [The Lancet](#) predicted that MDR-TB could account for 32.5% of all cases in Russia by 2040 and 12.4% in India.

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