The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has provoked multiple crises, undermining health, development and human security. This is a reflection of fragility and weakness of health systems, and reinforces the critical need for health system strengthening and preparedness. Current efforts to deliver COVID-19 vaccines bring to fore the vital importance of ensuring equitable access to, and delivery of, essential medicines, vaccines and diagnostic tools to address global health challenges.

Even while tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains vitally important to ensure that health priorities – such as those related to combating tuberculosis (TB), malaria and neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) – are not neglected. These diseases persist in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and impose a devastating human, social and economic burden, predominantly among the most poor and vulnerable populations. It is crucial to adopt measures to mitigate the reversal in progress towards the targets of ending the epidemics of TB, malaria and NTDs.

Strengthened institutional and technical capacities drive access to and delivery of affordable and quality-assured medicines, vaccines and diagnostic tools, and in promoting coherent approaches to building resilient health systems and sustaining universal health coverage. They are key, not only in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, but also towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3) targets of universal health coverage (UHC), as well as the other health-related SDGs, and ending the persistent established epidemics of TB, malaria and NTDs.

The Access and Delivery Partnership

Since 2013, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has led the Access and Delivery Partnership (ADP) in its work across a range of sectors and disciplines to accelerate the introduction and scale-up of new health technologies in LMICs. With support from the Government of Japan, ADP has helped improve national health systems’ preparedness for effective delivery of new medicines, vaccines and diagnostic tools.

The ADP partner organizations – UNDP, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) and PATH – are working in a unique collaboration to help countries build and strengthen their health systems to address today’s challenges and ultimately achieve health and well-being for all.

What we do

ADP supports countries to develop essential policies, human capacities, systems and regulations for access and delivery of health technologies in accordance with national needs and priorities. To increase countries’ capacities to address evolving health challenges and pandemic preparedness, ADP is prioritizing efforts to strengthen national responses to COVID-19, while continuing to build capacities to combat TB, malaria and NTDs. In doing so, ADP facilitates the scale up of digital solutions and South-South exchange and collaboration (see back page for more information). Since its inception, ADP partners have been guided by three implementation strategies:

**Strengthening policy, regulatory harmonization and coherence**

A coherent approach towards the selection, prioritization and use of health technologies will enable health technologies to reach people who need them faster. The national regulatory system must also operate in coordination with the procurement and supply chain management systems to facilitate swift access to quality assured health technologies. ADP works with focus countries and across regions to enable joined-up approaches across these areas.

**Strengthening institutions for accelerating health technology introduction and access**

In many countries, there is an urgent need to strengthen the skills, capacities and functions of institutions to support the effective introduction and uptake of new health technologies. Working with countries to identify specific needs and priorities, ADP partners draw on their expertise and experience to help strengthen these capacities, addressing critical gaps within national health systems including on preparedness during public health emergencies.

**Establishing and contributing to regional and global platforms for technology delivery preparedness**

ADP in-country implementation experience provides a source of learning, enabling partners to identify opportunities for South–South exchange so countries can learn from one another. In addition, ADP collaborates with the Global Health Innovative Technology (GHIT) Fund and other partners to promote collaboration and synergy in health technology innovation to help to address bottlenecks in the development and uptake of new health technologies.
A snapshot of the key results and achievements of ADP during April 2020-March 2021 at the country and regional levels

**Support to the COVID-19 pandemic response**

- Delivered WHO Regulatory Updates on COVID-19, providing key updates on status of clinical trials and emergency use authorizations of COVID-19 vaccines and diagnostics by stringent regulatory authorities (SRA) and the WHO Emergency Use Listing Procedure (EUL).
- Supported the Africa Medical Devices Forum (AMDF) in guiding African Union (AU) Member States on: i) accelerated approval of COVID-19 in vitro diagnostics and medical devices that have received WHO/EUL approval; and ii) assessment of COVID-19 assays and related market surveillance.
- Conducted a regional risk-based survey to identify prevalence of sub-standard and falsified medicines (e.g. antimalarials, antibiotics and antiviral treatments for COVID-19) to inform regulatory action in the 15 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).
- Strengthened capacities of health workers and pharmacovigilance (PV) focal points in Ghana, Malawi and Senegal to perform active surveillance and reporting of adverse events for COVID-19 treatments and vaccines.
- Strengthened implementation research (IR) capacity among local researchers and programme implementers in Benin, Burkina Faso and Senegal to identify and address COVID-19 challenges to national TB programmes, and to inform policy measures for sustaining crucial TB services.
- Delivered a three-part webinar series: Using evidence to address health care challenges in LMICs, on application of health technology assessment (HTA) priority-setting principles to optimize national immunization and health service delivery efforts in the context of COVID-19, which brought together participants from 25 countries.
- Revised standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the mass drug administration (MDA) programme for NTDs in Senegal to incorporate measures to address new implementation challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Documented good practices from India and Indonesia on the use of digital systems to support distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, for transfer of technical knowledge to other LMICs in the process of scaling up their COVID-19 vaccination programmes (including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal).
- Promoted use of low-cost and easily accessible digital solutions such as the Med Safety mobile application and the unstructured supplementary service data (USSD) mobile platform to strengthen PV systems for COVID-19 vaccines in Ghana and Malawi, respectively.

**Bhutan**

- Facilitated the transfer of technical knowledge for the development of the Bhutan Vaccine System which enabled rapid, efficient and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, resulting in one of the fastest vaccination drives in the world.
- Strengthened capacity of regulatory inspectors from the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) on 'good distribution practices' and quality-risk management during regulatory inspections to ensure quality and integrity of medicines during all aspects of the distribution process.
- Supported the institutionalization of HTA as a systematic tool to inform the prioritization and selection of cost-effective medicines, vaccines and diagnostics. A study is being conducted on estimating the cost-effectiveness threshold to inform the expansion of the UHC package of support.

**Burkina Faso**

- Supported the national TB programme to monitor and manage adverse events of new TB medicines, and to advocate for the inclusion of alternative health care providers in pharmacovigilance.
- Supported the NRA in conducting a self-assessment using the WHO Global Benchmarking Tool and development of an Institutional Development Plan (IDP).
- Improved quality assurance, safety monitoring and integrity of medicines and vaccines throughout the supply chain by strengthening capacities of regulatory inspectors on ‘good distribution practices’; quality control laboratories on the evaluation of quality of medicines; and health workers on detecting and managing adverse events.
India

- Established a virtual platform for the SAVING consortium to enable members to engage remotely for integrated planning, coordination and capacity building on the introduction of the RTS,S malaria vaccine.
- Strengthened technical capacities of health workers from 30 lower-level health facilities across six regions to monitor, manage and report adverse drug reactions (ADR) and adverse events following immunization (AEFI).
- Supported the Ghana Food and Drug Authority to conduct a legal and policy review for the domestication of the AU Model Law on Medical Products Regulation (AU Model Law).
- Strengthened the capacity of health workers in NTDs in three regions to conduct IR on the influence of gender on equitable access to health services.
- Strengthened the institutionalization of HTAs through development of national HTA guidelines and by providing technical guidance on HTA legislation.
- Supported the National Medicine Price Committee to develop national guidelines and strengthen technical capacities for medicines price regulation and the creation of a medicines price observatory to monitor medicines prices across public and private sector supply chains.

Ghana

- Facilitated South–South technology transfer from India to ADP focus countries and other LMICs on implementation of the electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN), including lessons from ongoing efforts to digitize inventory management of the COVID-19 vaccines and beneficiary tracking.

Indonesia

- Supported the National Quality Control Laboratory of Drug and Food in training the staff of regional laboratories and pharmaceutical industry actors on policy and practice in medicine safety and quality.
- Supported the development of a National action plan on the implementation of active TB drug safety monitoring and management (aDSM) to improve safety monitoring of drug-resistant TB treatment.
- Convened training workshops on pharmaceutical pricing strategies and policy to build technical capacity and strengthen decision-making on pharmaceutical price regulation.
- Supported the national public procurement agency on introduction of the multiple criteria decision analysis mechanism to facilitate decision-making on best value selection of health products and vendors for the national e-catalogue.
Malawi

- Strengthened capacity of the National Quality Control Laboratory to monitor medicines quality using the *WHO International Chemical Reference Substances* database and the submission of test samples to the *WHO International Pharmacopoeia*.
- Supported self-benchmarking of the NRA and development of an IDP as a preparatory step towards formal assessment with the WHO Global Benchmarking Tool.
- Strengthened national capacities to monitor and manage ADR/AEFI through an integrated PV system in five tertiary hospitals and 29 district hospitals.
- Supported the roll-out of a USSD mobile platform: a free, user-friendly digital system to simplify ADR and AEFI reporting for health professionals and consumers.
- Supported an awareness-raising campaign on the importance of reporting ADRs and AEFIs and to raise public awareness of the various reporting channels available.

United Republic of Tanzania

- Continued support for the delivery and uptake of paediatric praziquantel formulation for the Schistosomiasis (STEPPS) initiative, the multi-stakeholder platform aimed at facilitating integrated planning for the roll-out, in anticipation of regulatory approval.
- Conducted analysis of public sector medicine prices to identify key cost drivers of the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF), to inform prioritization of the NHIF reimbursement list and enhance the rational use of medicines in the public sector.
- Continued support for regulatory system strengthening to maintain current Maturity Level 3 rating, including technical assistance to review WHO prequalification requirements and good distribution practices for quality assurance of health technologies.
- Contributed to institutionalization of the HTA through support on development of national HTA committee guidelines and advocacy efforts to build commitment of policymakers for wider adoption of the HTA approach.

Senegal

- Supported NRA self-benchmarking and development of an IDP, and support to strengthen capacities for regulatory inspection of the pharmaceutical supply chain.
- Established a multisector coordinating platform to plan and implement studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on national malaria, TB and NTDs control programmes and to inform the development of risk mitigation plans and policy measures.
- Supported evaluation of the national PV system, including development and implementation of a work plan to enable consolidation of the national PV system across disease control programmes.
- Provided PV training to health workers across 22 COVID-19 treatment centres in five regions, enabling collection of active surveillance data from over 5,600 patients to analyze frequency of ADR among COVID-19 patients.
- Adapted best practices into national guidelines, SOPs and a training manual for supply chain management of NTDs medicines in MDA campaigns.

Thailand

- Facilitated South-South cooperation through leveraging institutional expertise and experience in Thailand, through partnership with the Health Intervention Technology Assessment Program (HiTAP) to provide technical assistance to LMICs on HTA approaches.
- Strengthened capacity of NRA to conduct risk-based regulatory inspection and quality control testing to maintain pharmaceutical quality and integrity standards throughout the supply chain.
- Continued support for implementation of the IDP for the NRA, which has facilitated implementation of 70 percent of formal benchmarking recommendations.
Regional and South-South

- Promoted the use of the *Guidance Document for Domestication of the African Union Model Law on Medical Products Regulation*, jointly developed by the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and ADP, to inform AU Member States of good practice approaches in domestication of the AU Model Law.
- Supported self-benchmarking of NRAs in six Member States of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), with the aim of conducting formal Global Benchmarking Tool assessments in 2021 and 2022.
- Promoted regulatory harmonization for medical devices through support for the AMDF on training national regulators from 25 countries in the Africa region and the development of four guidance documents relating to the manufacturing, regulatory requirements and registration of medical devices and in vitro diagnostics (IVDs).
- Conducted a gender analysis of the WHO Model List of Essential In Vitro Diagnostics to provide an evaluation framework on the gender dimensions of access to diagnostic products and the List of Essential In Vitro Diagnostics to promote equitable access.
- Conducted a comprehensive mapping of capacities and expertise within NRAs and national reference laboratories in 54 countries in the Africa region to identify regulatory gaps and promote collaboration.
- Updated the IR Toolkit with a module on gender and intersectional analysis, to enable a more inclusive and effective response to infectious diseases of poverty.
- Conducted training-of-trainers on the IR Toolkit for French speaking facilitators, followed by a training of francophone country stakeholders from seven countries in West and Central Africa.
- Facilitated South–South exchanges between national TB programmes and PV units from 27 countries in West and Central Africa on aDSM best practices and systematic use of IR for safe and efficient introduction of new TB treatment strategies.
- Published a guide to support value-based public-sector procurement of medical equipment in LMICs, which will inform the development of a training curriculum for national procurement agencies in Peru and Senegal.
- Convened the ADP South–South Exchange and Learning Platform through a series of four virtual consultations, bringing together government stakeholders and experts from over 20 countries, to promote collaboration and knowledge-sharing and ensure health system preparedness for the introduction of new health technologies.

Global

- Continued collaboration with the Government of Japan and the GHIT Fund on the Uniting Efforts for Innovation, Access and Delivery initiative, and published two knowledge products: *Landscape of funding and financing opportunities for access and delivery of health technologies for neglected diseases* and *Guidance note for the development of national investment cases for neglected diseases*, which were launched during interactive webinars.
- Initiated collaboration with the WHO NTDs Department to develop common guidance and tools for NTDs national investment cases to improve financing for health technologies for neglected diseases as a contribution towards the country-led implementation of the new WHO Road Map for NTDs (2021–2030).
- Launched the ADP Community online platform dedicated to strengthening collaboration and learning among stakeholders from ADP focus countries, which has facilitated information flows for timely evidence-based policy and programme planning for COVID-19 and other priority diseases.
Key priorities

In today's rapidly changing global health context, ADP is focused on capacity strengthening across a range of national COVID-19, TB, malaria and NTD priorities in response to established and emerging health system challenges:

- **Supporting national responses to COVID-19:** Given the current need to ensure delivery and equitable access to safe and effective COVID-19 tests and vaccines, ADP is supporting countries to ensure timely diagnostic and vaccine deployment through integrated planning, multisectoral coordination, and regulatory preparedness capacity and supply chain strengthening.

- **Strengthening disease control for TB, malaria and NTDs:** ADP is sustaining and advancing its long-standing commitment to supporting national disease control programmes against TB, malaria and NTDs. Maintaining the most critical prevention activities and care services is essential to reducing the indirect impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations.

- **Facilitating South-South exchange and collaboration:** Pandemic responses require sharing of experiences and rapid flows of practical solutions between countries for optimal policy- and decision-making. To complement its in-country activities, ADP facilitates South-South learning and exchanges on policy, programmatic and technical issues that represent common challenges across different health systems, while also expanding the partnership’s reach and impact.

- **Promoting digital health:** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation, including through improved models of health service delivery. ADP is supporting countries to strengthen policy frameworks, governance structures and health workforce capacities to ensure local ecosystem readiness, and identify digital health interventions that are appropriate, cost-effective and sustainable.

The ADP approach: Multisectoral, collaborative and integrated

As important advances take place in health research and product development, it is vital to ensure that promising new pipeline technologies can benefit people in need through continued and strategic investments. Through multisectoral capacity strengthening, ADP supports LMICs to ensure that once new technologies are available, they can be swiftly introduced and made available in an equitable manner.

Acknowledging that multiple disciplines, sectors and partners are critical across the value chain of access and delivery, ADP promotes three principles: **country ownership** for long-term sustainability and focus on priorities defined by country stakeholders; **cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaborations** to include various perspectives from critical sectors across the value chain; and **South-South learning and cooperation** for mutual knowledge exchange and learning.

With four core partners – UNDP, WHO, TDR and PATH – ADP is well positioned to provide expanded policy and technical support to strengthen capacities and institutions for the introduction and scale-up of new health technologies. The integrated nature of ADP’s support stretches across the value chain from enabling policy, regulatory and legal frameworks, implementation research, procurement and supply chain management and, ultimately, to service delivery and patient safety monitoring. In line with the UNDP Strategic Plan: 2022–2025 and UNDP’s HIV and Health Strategy 2022–2025, both of which acknowledge the need to build resilient and sustainable health systems as the foundation for achieving the interlinked and mutually-reinforcing goals of health and development, it is clear that strengthening institutional and technical capacities of health systems and supporting national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are two sides of the same coin; each driving access to, and delivery of, affordable and quality-assured health technologies towards the achievement of universal health coverage and strengthening human security.