

# TODAY WE CAN IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF AFRICA FOREVER

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## OPINION

**By: Macky Sall, President of Senegal and Chairperson of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee**

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### **Today we can improve the health of Africa forever**

The international community will decide this week in Washington whether or not to take the next big step on the path to ending AIDS. At a special conference, they will be pledging new contributions to replenish the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This is one of the best investments in global health and development we know.

Over the past decade, Global Fund-supported programs have saved millions of lives. With governments, multi-lateral organizations and civil society working in partnership, this global health response has quite literally changed the course of health and economies in countries around the world.

We believe full replenishment of the Global Fund can reap even greater benefits in the coming years, dramatically reducing HIV infection rates, AIDS deaths and malaria and TB cases. We are close to a “tipping point,” at which investments now could help put these diseases firmly under control—or, if we wait, risks tipping us decades behind. In short, either we can pay now, or pay forever.

This replenishment conference is focused on shared responsibility and global solidarity. Today investing in health is a shared responsibility—with more than half of all HIV-related spending coming from developing countries themselves. As we urge donor governments to sustain and increase their funding, African governments are also recommitting to increase their contributions to end these diseases.

If the measure of a good investment is found in the numbers, we are succeeding. The Global Fund saves more than 100 000 lives every month. Since its founding, the Global Fund has provided HIV treatment to 4 million people, delivered more than 300 million anti-malaria bed nets and diagnosed and treated almost 10 million cases of TB. These lifesaving initiatives have also saved billions of dollars by reducing health care costs, preserving families and growing economies.

The benefits go far beyond pills and bed nets. Early on, policymakers learned from families and communities on the ground that focusing on these diseases in isolation was not enough—we

also needed to leverage Global Fund investments to strengthen health systems and provide support to help people affected by HIV, TB and malaria rebuild their lives with dignity.

The African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) are working together to transform Africa. In the spirit of shared responsibility, many countries have stepped up their domestic investments and an increasing number are taking ownership of their health programs. We are seeing the returns on these investments. For example, in Senegal, the number of new HIV infections has dropped more than 50% between 2001 and 2012.

In Ethiopia, Global Fund support has enabled the Ministry of Health to train more than 30 000 extension health workers—nearly all women—to provide basic health care such as immunizations and HIV testing and counseling to families in their homes. With the help of these new health professionals, rates of new HIV infections in adults dropped an astonishing 90% between 2001 and 2011.

To truly understand what these investments mean, you need to talk with someone like Bizunesh Wada, a mother of four in Ethiopia. Bizunesh's husband had died of AIDS, and she was also diagnosed with HIV. She worried about raising a family on her own. Global Fund-supported programs provided her not only with life-saving treatment but also with entrepreneurship training and a microloan, which she used to purchase a single ox that has since led to a thriving farm that is helping her put her children through school.

The replenishment conference is an inspiring example of what can happen when the world unites around an urgent need. Many donors have been generous, the United States particularly so, contributing a third of the Global Fund's total funding. With this continued strong support, from the US and all partners, the Global Fund will be well positioned to deliver continued results.

As a result, mothers and fathers remain healthy enough to raise their children. Farmers can continue to tend their crops so their communities don't go hungry. Young people are staying in school, starting businesses, and generating the new ideas we need to move our economies forward.

In Africa we say: "if you want to go fast, go alone—but if you want to go far, go together". We stand in solidarity with our peers in Africa, Asia, America and Europe to ensure the continued success of the Global Fund. It's a lifesaving investment with an incomparable payoff: the potential end of the deadly AIDS, TB, and malaria epidemics.

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## **UNAIDS**

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at [unaids.org](http://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.