



# Reimagining Partnerships: Rethinking Solutions to Advance Access and Equity

Roundtable discussion hosted by Rabin Martin  
at the 77<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly

May 29, 2024 | Geneva, Switzerland



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# Introduction

Rabin Martin convened a multi-disciplinary group during the 77<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA) to discuss roadblocks and opportunities to advance new types of collaborative solutions to sustainably address health equity gaps that affect people across the globe. Partnerships are a cornerstone of our work as a leading global health consulting firm. The May 2024 discussion stemmed from our experience with varied clients and partners and built on the robust conversation at WHA in 2023—Driving Multi-Sector Innovation to Advance Health Equity—and subsequent report.

Globally, there is a growing dual burden of non-communicable and infectious diseases that is straining health systems, with disproportionate impact in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The compounding effects of climate change, rapid urbanization, mass migration and conflict are increasing the complexity of these global health challenges as well as impeding progress towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and advancing health equity.

A whole-of-society approach—cross-sector collaboration among governments, multilateral institutions, private sector, patient advocates and academia—is table stakes.

*What is required is a reimagining of partnerships and how industry can—and should—pursue holistic, integrated and innovative strategies to improve health for all.*

Participants in the roundtable discussion were from industry, civil society, and multilateral institutions working across various geographies and health areas—NCDs, infectious diseases, neglected tropical diseases and urban health. They reflected on the “art of the possible” in partnerships to propel innovation for sustainable, equitable impact at scale in LMICs.

Dr. Cary Adams, CEO, Union for International Cancer Control, moderated the discussion.



# Key Insights

1. Not all partnerships are the same—nor should they be
2. Take an inclusive and long-term approach to partnering
3. Leverage community strengths—don't rely on philanthropy
4. Align business and public health incentives
5. Secure buy-in from senior leadership



## 1. Not all partnerships are the same—nor should they be

Making progress on global health challenges and advancing equity are complex, multifaceted endeavors. While collaborations are essential, not everything is a “partnership,” and the term may have lost its meaning from overuse. What is important to consider is the varied ways stakeholders need to work together to effect change.

Collaborations may be related to advocacy, joint offerings or implementation; include a couple of partners or many as part of a multi-stakeholder coalition; focus narrowly on health companies and services or explore broader areas and industries that influence health. Regardless, it is important to be clear at the outset regarding expectations, investment, involvement, measurement and accountability. Creating archetypes for partnerships and establishing best practices for each would be valuable in guiding collaborations.



## 2. Take an inclusive and long-term approach to partnering

Increasingly, the solutions to health challenges extend beyond health, especially when it comes to equity. Collaborating with other industries, such as the tech industry, is growing in importance.

While it was acknowledged that multisector and cross-sector partnerships are the path to impact, the question raised was “how many have an appetite for that when bilateral partnerships are so much easier?” Nonetheless, participants agreed that multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed throughout the value chain.

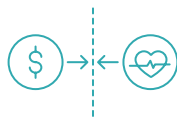
In designing a partnership, it is critical to assess who benefits along each step of the value chain to determine which entities should be involved. Systems thinking to create one end-to-end plan is what will build resilient systems and lead to sustainable impact.



### 3. Leverage community strengths—don't rely on philanthropy

Too often, the strengths of communities that are the “beneficiaries” of many partnerships involving the health care industry are overlooked. The talent base is there and must be leveraged—shifting the mindset from bringing solutions from the Global North to help the Global South.

In the same vein, creating a sustainable market and building ecosystems that work for all should be the goal for long-term health impact. Philanthropy—in many cases—may have run its course.



### 4. Align business and public health incentives

Aligning business and public health incentives is difficult but critical for shaping a market for sustainable health impact. Trust is core to developing a shared strategy to meet a common goal.

Too often there is deep-rooted skepticism about the private sector's motivations for engaging in partnerships as well as concerns about what will happen when companies leave. Multiple sources of funding are an effective risk management strategy for public health initiatives.

Participants noted Gavi as an example of creating the right incentives for industry involvement at the right level to achieve public health impact. Gavi has addressed market failures in bringing vaccines to LMICs by agreeing to purchase a large volume of vaccines at a set price to encourage pharmaceutical companies to develop and produce them.



### 5. Secure buy-in from senior leadership

Building effective partnerships with communities is the path forward to improve health in LMICs—and it takes time, investment and senior leadership commitment. Participants from industry noted the importance of leaders shifting their mindset from what has worked in developed markets to supporting innovation that can create new markets.

Foundational for success is an enabling internal environment—one where leaders are providing the runway and resources to prepare teams on the ground to engage with communities and create and manage effective partnerships.

# Moving Forward

The global community has set clear goals and targets through the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 17 which calls for global partnership for sustainable development. To accelerate progress toward the SDGs, more creativity and rigor are required to develop diverse partnerships, structure them effectively, and monitor their performance. The global community's ability to markedly improve equitable health outcomes depends on alignment among all parties regarding goals, expectations, commitments and incentives—underpinned by trust.

## The key is to:

- ✓ **Determine what kind of partnership is needed.** Think broadly about which partners need to be involved to achieve the desired health outcomes and establish KPIs at the outset.
- ✓ **Define the right structure to help partnerships succeed.** Coalitions may be challenging to organize but can be effective, especially if a secretariat is brought on board to steer and keep everyone on track and on the same page.
- ✓ **Strive to align commercial and global health interests.** Consider models that provide incentives for all parties involved to avoid short-term gains at the expense of sustainable long-term impact.
- ✓ **Respond to communities' needs.** Communities are the experts and should take the lead in determining the resources they need—financial, product, capacity building—to meet the health challenges they are confronting.
- ✓ **Be more bold.** Achieving health outcomes at scale and reducing disparities requires taking risks to develop new models and making the case to leaders for greater investment in innovation.

Global health challenges are evolving, and the partnerships required to address them must keep pace. It's time to create new models for collaboration across sectors and disciplines that are fit-for-purpose and anticipate a changing health ecosystem. Taking a systems approach, aligning business and global health incentives, designing initiatives and strategies with communities, and reimagining what is possible are the building blocks for achieving sustainable, equitable health impact at scale.