

Kampala Declaration on cooperation and solidarity for health equity within and beyond aid

Across the world, health equity is denied, and development assistance for health – “aid” – often reinforces the power imbalances that underlie health inequities. The priorities of Northern donors dictate the aid agenda, implemented by NGOs and Southern ‘partners’ they fund. These priorities often clash with the needs and concerns of communities, governments and civil society in many countries around the world.

The aid space is dominated by powerful interests, while the voices of those most affected by health inequity are regularly tokenised or excluded from the conversation. Many actors within the sector – even among communities and civil society – do not question the underlying premise and structures of health aid. Their own ideas and world views have been shaped by, and for, aid and the industry that supports it. Questioning aid poses challenges to the professions, livelihoods and sources of power for those who work within the sector.

Furthermore, whilst health aid is important in some situations, on its own aid can never lead to a world where all people can live healthy lives. To do so, we must tackle the underlying root causes that create and perpetuate poor health, including unfair trade agreements, tax injustice, the climate crisis, the weakness of existing guidance on health assistance, the unfettered exploitation and extraction of natural resources, under-resourced health systems, and the politico-economic incentives that reinforce those disease-producing forces. These social, commercial, economic and political determinants of health have been tolerated or ignored by aid, thereby reinforcing the health inequities that aid is meant to resolve.

We believe that collective social action in solidarity as one global community, working together to address the root causes of our struggle for health, can transform aid into an equitable means of ensuring health rights. This means acting out of compassion in the pursuit of justice, and caring, listening and helping each other in a way that promotes connectedness and equity throughout the world.

Through the Kampala Initiative, we commit to expose, explore, challenge and transform health aid through dialogue, advocacy, activism and action. We commit to build cooperation and solidarity for health, within and beyond the practice of aid, to build a future where health justice and equity are realised, and aid is no longer a necessity.

Specifically we will:

- Advance a critical analysis of aid and challenge its misuse;
- Challenge the power dynamics at the heart of aid structures;
- Acknowledge and act upon the root causes of poor health, never pretending that aid is the solution;
- Challenge damaging narratives of aid and charity where they exist;
- Correct damaging power dynamics where they exist within our own organisations;
- Collaborate in solidarity as partners in the Global South and North, to ensure that international health finance is grounded in social justice rather than neo-colonial ideas and practices.

Kampala/Geneva, 27 January 2020

Kampala Declaration with list of signatories:

<https://www.medicusmundi.org/kampaladeclaration/>