



**Unitaid Executive Board Meeting**  
**39<sup>th</sup> Session**  
**15-16 December 2021**  
**Organized via videoconference**

**Agenda item 3**

**Minutes of the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Board**  
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For Information  For Review and Advice  For Approval

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
1. Opening remarks from the Chair .....	4
2. Agenda of the EB38 meeting .....	4
3. Minutes from previous meeting: EB37, 9-10 December 2020 .....	4
4. Report from the Executive Director .....	4
5. Report and recommendations from the Finance and Accountability Committee (FAC) and from the joint FAC/PSC meeting.....	5
6. CLOSED SESSION for Board Members and Alternates.....	5
7. Presentation of the preliminary findings of the External Review of Unitaid Strategy 2017-2021 report by ITAD.....	5
8. Update on Strategy 2022-2026 development .....	6
9. Unitaid and Global Public Goods .....	7
10. Report of the Governance Working Group.....	8
11. Report from the Chair of the Proposal Review Committee .....	9
12. Proposal Review Committee Replenishment.....	9
13. Portfolio Performance including strategic and operational KPIs and impact of COVID-19 on the portfolio .....	10
14. List of participants.....	12

## Executive Summary

The Board Members expressed appreciation for how Unitaid has been able to play a central role in the COVID-19 response and at the same time maintain focus on the core portfolio, stating that this achievement is a testament to the hard work of Unitaid Secretariat staff and the value of the Unitaid model.

The Board adopted the audited financial statements for 2020, the flexibility to utilize the overhead cost recovery to continue the short-term staffing arrangements to support the COVID-related work and the increase of the allocation to the African Countries Constituency for 2021.

The final External Review report will be shared with the Board and the Unitaid Secretariat on 7 July. In mid-July the Itad review team, the PSC and members of the Unitaid Secretariat will participate in a co-creation workshop to discuss the external review report findings, draw lessons based on evidence and agree on proposed recommendations.

Regarding the development of the new Strategy, Board Members highlighted the need for Unitaid to keep a strong focus on the three pandemics and equitable access in the next strategy.

The Board recognized this unique opportunity of the 'Global Public Good' discussion and the increased attention Unitaid has been gaining and supported the organization's efforts to continue to raise awareness and visibility around its work and public health impact. Members felt that Unitaid is particularly well-placed to respond to the growing need for the tools for fighting COVID-19 to make them accessible to the populations that need them.

The GWG recommendations were not finalized and further discussion of the GWG was needed. All countries occupying individual Executive Board (EB) Seats were invited to formally notify the Chair of GWG, by 15 October 2021, whether they are willing to share their Seat with another existing sovereign Board Member or a new donor country.

The report of the Chair of the Proposal Review Committee (PRC) highlighted an exceptionally busy first half of the year with 54% more time investment as compared to the same period of the previous year. The time dedicated to the COVID proposal and grant reviews increased by 62% and the time for the review of regular proposals and UnitaidExplore applications increased by 50%.

The Board appointed Ms Judit Rius Sanjuan as intellectual property expert and Mr Nelson Otwoma as community demand generation expert of the Proposal Review Committee (PRC) for the period July 2021 to 30 June 2022.

The Board Members congratulated the Secretariat for an excellent, comprehensive and clear portfolio performance report. They recognized the high quality of grants' one pagers, a good way to present the direction & challenges of each project. The Board valued Unitaid's work on diagnostics and therapeutics grants to address Covid crisis, recognized the importance of UnitaidExplore and the work dedicated to global oxygen supplier's cooperation.

## **1. Opening remarks from the Chair**

The Chair highlighted some changes in the global health architecture that have increased the visibility of Unitaid's work, e.g. the active involvement in the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A). She also recognized the trends towards funding volatility and noted the still growing number of global health needs within Unitaid's mandate. While additional resources for ACT-A work are expected, additional sources of funding for the core funding need to be explored. The next Strategy will need to reflect these changes and challenges. In addition, such demanding context requires Unitaid to sharpen and refine even further its prioritization framework and tools.

New Board Members and Alternate Board Members were welcomed to the meeting.

## **2. Agenda of the EB38 meeting**

The Board adopted the agenda of the meeting (UNITAID/EB38/2021/1/REV2).

## **3. Minutes from previous meeting: EB37, 9-10 December 2020**

The Board adopted the minutes of the 37th Executive Board (EB) meeting of December 2020 (UNITAID/EB38/2021/2).

## **4. Report from the Executive Director**

The Executive Director highlighted the significant challenges Unitaid has faced since the last report to the Board, the progress the organization has been able to make despite the current context and the opportunities he sees going forward.

The pandemic is ongoing with different dynamics in different regions and it is difficult to predict future developments. We are seeing a direct impact on individuals affected by the virus, mortality but also challenges accessing healthcare. The pandemic is also having a profound impact on economies and has put funding at risk. Despite progress over the last year in responding to COVID-19, there is significant inequity despite progress in Lower Middle Income Countries (LMICs). There are also challenges with country preparedness. Unitaid is looking at ways to support countries, including how the organization can approach test and treat when treatment becomes available, as well as continued work on oxygen which remains a significant gap exposed by the pandemic. At the same time, internally, Unitaid is focused on ensuring the resilience of its core activities, ensuring funding for key priorities and managing staff workload and overall wellbeing.

Despite these challenges Unitaid has forged even stronger engagement under ACT-A and with its grant implementers. Earlier this year Unitaid updated its ACT-A strategy and developed a related investment plan. Unitaid has also used the last six months to further simplify grant management and leverage its increased visibility to support broader engagement in resource mobilization. Going forward the organization will work to strengthen the donor relationships in the context of the COVID-19 response to enhance core funding.

In line with his report, the Executive Director briefed the Board on progress against the five key priorities set out for him by the Board at the end of last year: i) Reinforce and manage our portfolio; ii) Engage in the COVID-19 response; iii) Develop Unitaid's Strategy for 2022-26; iv) Mobilize additional resources and leverage partners and v) Enhance staff engagement and well-being.

The Board thanked the Executive Director for the comprehensive report and thanked the Secretariat for their extraordinary work over the past six months in difficult circumstances. They noted that progress towards the Executive Director's priorities are on track despite challenges. The Board Members expressed appreciation for how Unitaid has been able to play a central role in the COVID-19 response and at the same time maintain focus on the core portfolio, stating that this achievement is a testament to the hard work of Unitaid Secretariat staff and the value of the Unitaid model. They commended the Executive Director for his focus on staff well-being and the various measures being taken. Finally, the Board complemented the organization for its carbon footprint assessment, noting its innovation in the context of the global health architecture.

## **5. Report and recommendations from the Finance and Accountability Committee (FAC) and from the joint FAC/PSC meeting**

The Board noted the report from 27th meeting of the Finance and Accountability Committee, and its recommendations (UNITAID/EB38/2021/5).

### a) Financial performance 2020

The Board adopted the audited financial statements for 2020 (UNITAID/EB38/2021/R1). The Board noted that a clean audit opinion from external auditors was received for 2020. There were three recommendations for the 2020 audit which will be addressed by the Secretariat in 2021.

### b) Requested flexibility to manage ACT-A resources

In the UNITAID/EB38/2021/R2 the Board adopted the requested flexibility to utilize the overhead cost recovery to continue the short-term staffing arrangements to support the COVID-related work.

### c) African countries budget

The Board adopted (UNITAID/EB38/2021/R3) the increase of the allocation to the African Countries Constituency for 2021 to cover the cost of reinforcing the representation of all regions of African countries.

## **6. CLOSED SESSION for Board Members and Alternates**

### **7. Presentation of the preliminary findings of the External Review of Unitaid Strategy 2017-2021 report by ITAD**

The Board Chair called for a forward-looking perspective for Unitaid's next strategy, including the significant changes provoked by the pandemic. The future strategy must build on, and move beyond, the organization's current strategy. She noted some challenging questions related to the organization's mandate on the three diseases, how Unitaid defines its portfolio and works with middle income countries and how the organization can better engage with specific stakeholders, including governments and civil society.

Itad made a presentation on its analysis and preliminary findings which were framed under three overarching questions (To what extent is Unitaid's strategy focusing on the right things? How well is the strategy being operationalized? To what extent is the strategy achieving the right results?) and five areas (relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and equity).

The Board acknowledged that the outputs of the external review are still preliminary and only based on half of the data collected. They noted that many findings sounded familiar and called for more information on the specific results the Itad team found based on a more detailed synthesis of the various data they collected.

Various aspects of risk were discussed including Unitaïd’s level of risk tolerance. Regarding the question of Unitaïd’s approach being risk averse, the Executive Director highlighted a nuanced approach to risk management. He noted that engaging in the three diseases often has less risk as this is an area where there are large donors, longstanding partnerships and scale-up partners. The other areas, such as COVID-19, Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), and Reproductive, Maternal, New-born and Child Health (RMNCH), are relatively new areas for Unitaïd and have a different landscape of donors and partners. The Board Members also noted trade-offs, for example in managing risk and enabling speed and agility and agreed that it is important to discern between risk in the context of how the Secretariat manages its grant portfolio versus the level of risk the organization is willing to take in the areas for investment.

The Board Members discussed that Unitaïd does not itself scale-up innovations but creates the conditions for scale-up. They agreed it was important to clarify this further amongst the Members to ensure a shared understanding. They emphasized the need for introduction and scale-up of products to be sustained in the long term, not just as temporary solutions.

Regarding evaluations of Unitaïd grants ten to fifteen years after their implementation, the Board questioned if this is a realistic expectation and how common this is amongst other global health players. Regarding Unitaïd’s impact, the Executive Director called on Itad to look at the Global Fund’s report on market shaping. He noted that many of the examples are closely connected to the work of Unitaïd and provide evidence that could respond to the question of Unitaïd’s impact over the long term.

The final evaluation report will be shared with the Board and the Unitaïd Secretariat on 7 July. In mid-July the Itad review team, the PSC and members of the Unitaïd Secretariat will participate in a co-creation workshop to discuss the external review report findings, draw lessons based on evidence and agree on proposed recommendations.

## **8. Update on Strategy 2022-2026 development**

The Secretariat’s presentation provided an update on the strategy development process to date, including emerging findings and directions from the first phase of the process as well as the next steps going forward.

The initial phase of the strategy development will be ending in the next few weeks. During this phase, the Secretariat conducted several internally focused analyses on Unitaïd’s strengths, weaknesses and gaps, as well as external analyses of the global context and the impact of emerging trends on the organisation. Extensive consultations have taken place with the Executive Board Members, the Secretariat staff and with external partners. Outcomes from the Secretariat’s analyses will be reviewed considering final findings from the external review.

The next phase of the strategy development will focus on shaping the next strategy and includes the development of Unitaïd’s vision and strategic direction. This process will be highly interactive and build on an external review workshop with the PSC/EB in July as well as a retreat in the autumn, in addition

to scheduled touchpoints in October and December. The Secretariat aims to have a skeleton of the new strategy by the end of the year, for alignment with the EB in December, and to develop the different components of the strategy in 2022.

Going forward into this next phase, the Secretariat will be exploring several themes, including developing Unitaïd’s prominence and leadership in shaping the global response, building alliances to deliver on its objectives and engage more meaningfully with countries and communities, ensuring its investments not only improve the health of patients, but also improve the care experience and overall health system beyond immediate disease outcomes. The Secretariat will also consider the different roles it plays in HIV, TB, malaria, maternal and child health as well as COVID-19 and convey these more clearly around a specific investment approach. Finally, it will explore opportunities to drive the portfolio with a higher level impact intent, for instance by articulating the Area for Intervention (Afi) targets upfront.

The Board Members highlighted the need for Unitaïd to keep a strong focus on the three pandemics and equitable access in the next strategy. They recognized that developing the framework and process for filtering and prioritizing investments will be important. The Board Members emphasized uncertainty in the current funding landscape and recommended that the Secretariat gives due consideration to how this may impact resource mobilization under the next strategy. Several important themes were brought forward for consideration by the Secretariat, including the role of technology interventions, the importance of country engagement and dialogue and the need for increased cooperation in supporting local production.

## **9. Unitaïd and Global Public Goods**

The Board Members were invited to consider how Unitaïd’s commitment to equitable access fits within current and recent high-level discussions regarding Global Public Goods. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased attention and interest to the issue of Global Public Goods on a level that previously was not thought possible, with the United States calling for patent sharing for vaccines and the G7 declaration recognizing the positive impact of voluntary licensing and technology transfer on the pandemic response, as well as highlighting Unitaïd and MPP’s particular role in expanding access and ensuring a more equitable pandemic response.

The Chair asked the Board Members to reflect on how Unitaïd could best leverage this opportunity in which many around the world are calling for exactly what Unitaïd has been delivering to the public health landscape since its foundation. This moment is particularly relevant as Unitaïd is in the process of developing its strategy for the 2022-2026 period.

The Board Members recognized this unique opportunity and the increased attention Unitaïd has been gaining and supported the organization’s efforts to continue to raise awareness and visibility around its work and public health impact. The Board Members felt that Unitaïd is particularly well-placed to respond to the growing need for the tools for fighting COVID-19 that are accessible to the populations that need them. Some Board Members raised concerns on the lack of consensus around the term ‘Global Public Good’ in a way that leads to loose accountability around these efforts.

The Secretariat shared some recent examples of efforts to harness the increased interest including the hosting of joint briefings with MPP and donor countries and plans for continued collaboration with

MPP to support licensing and technology transfer not only for the manufacturing of vaccines but also for promising new treatments currently in development.

The Board Members shared suggestions on the following opportunities for further development: the potential for expanding policy and advocacy work to help create more equitable pathways to tools earlier in the development processes in addition to investing in the course correction downstream; convening or facilitating local production and manufacturing of products; supporting greater knowledge sharing through technology access pools and waivers; additional investment in platform technologies that have the potential for wider-reaching impact; and taking a more holistic approach to engender broader impact across health systems and issues.

### **10. Report of the Governance Working Group**

The report of the Governance Working Group (GWG) focused on its work relating to the criteria for an expansion of governance structure.

The report reminded on the criteria adopted by the Board during its 37<sup>th</sup> meeting, in June 2019, through Res. EB32/2019/R9; as well as the creation, through Res. EB37/2020/R4, of a temporary, non-voting, shared Board Seat and the invitation for Japan to occupy this Seat, Res. EB37/2020/R5.

Based on these resolutions, the Working Group organized two workshops, on 24 March and 20 April, and held one meeting on 19 May.

The GWG recommendations were not finalized and further discussion of the GWG was needed. One of the suggested approaches involves sharing individual country Board seat with another existing sovereign Board Member or a new donor country on voluntary basis, founded on the principle of like-mindedness, thus keeping the EB small whilst bringing in new interests. This approach would enable response to Japan in December 2021, whilst allowing GWG to continue work in 2022 to establish new Board Seats.

The creation of two additional shared EB Seats with voting rights could be envisaged: a Donor Seat and Implementer's Seat to accommodate additional countries. The Donor Seat eligibility could involve specific time-bound financial contribution to Unitaids' core budget. The Implementer's Seat could accommodate Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) with Unitaids projects; high burden of the three diseases; significant role producing/scaling up health products or market shaping; and strong stance on access to medicines.

A clarification was provided that Seoul criteria apply to all seats and indicate the Board's willingness to create new seats.

All countries occupying individual EB Seats were invited to formally notify the Chair of the GWG, by 15 October 2021, whether they are willing to share their Seat with another existing sovereign Board Member or a new donor country.

The Board Members noted the need for a governance retreat to elaborate the criteria for accepting new Board Members. The Chair of GWG would share the proposed GWG workplan by the end of the month.



## **11. Report from the Chair of the Proposal Review Committee**

The report of the Chair of the Proposal Review Committee (PRC) highlighted an exceptionally busy first half of the year with 54% more time investment as compared to the same period of the previous year. The time dedicated to the COVID proposal and grant reviews increased by 62% and the time for the review of regular proposals and UnitaidExplore applications increased by 50%.

The two approved Unitaid Explore Pediatric Formulations investments represent high strategic value and good potential for impact. The COVID RfP proposals are of strategic value, however several concerns were highlighted including the risks linked to capacity of health systems, need for clearer linkages with the first wave of COVID investments in existing grants, the need to consider synergies between a negative test result and an opportunity to vaccinate.

The number of regular GAD reviews and the number of UnitaidExplore contractual arrangements in the first half of 2021 almost equalled the numbers for the full year 2020. COVID-19 extension reviews require an excellent planning and represent a significant time commitment, but the response was provided in less than 48 hours' time. The PRC Team endorsed the Secretariat's analysis assessed the COVID investments to represent a strategic, fast, efficient and coordinated response to the COVID-19 situation.

The progress report on the implementation of the UnitaidExplore mechanism indicated targeted outreach produced an additional 37% of applicants and good overall quality compared to the first call last year. Advancing of the contract materials and adding them to the application process has contributed to a more standardized Pitch-day, adding emphasis on the access conditions of the health products, developing an interim commercialization plan and addressing the due diligence issues as early as possible. Innovator ecosystem verifications and engagement of the Civil Society Organization (CSO) networks early in the process will help expand the applicant base from LMICs.

The Board Members noted that the engagement of the PRC in the development of AfIs is very limited. Conflict of Interest considerations are important for determining whether a partner can be consulted. Clarifications were made on the equity aspect of Unitaid Explore, the reporting process of Unitaid Explore implementation and feedback to proponents.

## **12. Proposal Review Committee Replenishment**

During its 35th session in June 2020, the Board approved renewal of the PRC Chair's appointment for the period June 2020- June 2023 and the renewal of the appointment of the current PRC Members for the period December 2020 – June 2022. These renewals were done based on the rationale for aligning the next PRC replenishment with the needs of the next Strategy. The full PRC replenishment would therefore be launched in January 2022.

The PRC Chair had proposed the replenishment of community demand generation and intellectual property expertise of the PRC Members based on the needs assessment and considering the discussion at the last Board meetings. The process steps had been agreed between the Chairs of the PRC and PSC, based on the PRC TOR and the learnings from the previous replenishment occasion.

The PRC Member selection process led by the two Chairs involved the review by the Secretariat, cross-checking by the PRC Chair and a joint meeting of both Chairs to agree on the screen-out and the first choice and second choice candidates from the shortlisted pool.

Candidates had to demonstrate exceptionally strong knowledge or more than 20 years of experience in their main expertise area. Long term employment as a staff member or full-time consultant with a Unitaid grantee (on an active grant) that is current or recent (over the past 6 months) constituted criteria for exclusion of the candidates. Long term, part-time consultancy agreements with grantee organizations were analysed on case by case basis, to ensure that the potential benefits from accepting the candidate outweigh the need to manage any eventual conflicts of interests.

Four applications from interested experts had been received: two for the main area of expertise in intellectual property and two in the main area of expertise in community demand generation. All four candidates were retained based on a meticulous conflict of interest assessment.

The Chairs recommended approval of Judit Rius for the area of expertise in intellectual property and Nelson Otwoma for the area of community demand generation. Violeta Ross would be included in the list of alternate appointees for the latter position.

The Board Members inquired on the nationality of the candidates, gender and regional balance in the PRC and the specific reasons for the first and second choice candidates with the primary area of expertise in community demand generation. It was clarified that both Nelson Otwoma and Violeta Ross have the required expertise in the main area of expertise, and both are former Board Members having represented the Communities delegation, and the choice of Nelson Otwoma was based on his larger scope of coverage of areas of expertise. In addition, the Communities delegation had issued a support letter for the candidature of Nelson Otwoma. The Board also noted the difficulty of finding the IP experts that would not be conflicted and the good quality of the recommended candidate.

The Board Adopted the resolution UNITAID/EB38/2021/R4 appointing two Issue-Specific PRC Members for the period July 2021 to 30 June 2022 as follows:

- Ms Judit Rius Sanjuan with primary expertise in intellectual property; and
- Mr Nelson Otwoma with primary expertise in community demand generation.

In addition, the Executive Board approved the inclusion of Ms Violeta Ross in the list of alternative appointees for the PRC.

### **13. Portfolio Performance including strategic and operational KPIs and impact of COVID-19 on the portfolio**

The Board heard about key highlights from the Unitaid active portfolio, its evolution, performance and challenges, with a specific focus on Covid-19 Impact on core grants and management of Covid-19 dedicated grants. From 2019 to 2020, Unitaid showed an increase in both the number of projects and the number of project implementers. The grant portfolio has now a similar financial value compared to 2019, even if the number of the new projects has increased. This is mainly because the new Covid-related projects are of lower budgetary value than other core grants: 14 Covid-19 grants represent less than 5% of the portfolio funding.

The Secretariat highlighted an unprecedented rise in workload, with the need for the staff to adapt to important changes and step up collectively. The Unitaid team's work has been well orchestrated and remains strong despite the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 period. The portfolio outcome

has remained 84% on track or exceeding over this time. The performance has varied though across areas, with top performances for the Cross-cutting & Covid and HIV grants. The majority of the AfIs fall within the desired programmatic performance and risk outlook zone.

Unitaid's portfolio has been facing continuous challenges (teething problems, the natural risks of clinical trials, lengthy process of WHO Research Ethics Review Committee (ERC)), and the Covid-19 related delays. Nevertheless, the level of Covid-19 disruption on the core activities has been decreased over time, showing the robust and resilient operating system of Unitaid and its partners.

The Board Members congratulated the Secretariat for the excellent, very comprehensive and clear presentation. Also, they recognized the high quality of grants' one pagers as a good way to present the direction & challenges of each project.

They valued Unitaid's work on diagnostics and therapeutics grants to address the Covid-19 crisis. The Board Members recognized the importance of UnitaidExplore and the work dedicated to global oxygen supplier's cooperation as very positive news. Above that, they also recalled the importance to preserve Unitaid's core activities. The Board noted the importance of the Prequalification (PQ) grant as a strategic cross cutting programme.

The Secretariat provided an overview of the strategic and operational KPIs for 2020. The reporting on the strategic KPIs included 9 grants totalling US\$314 million in value, and demonstrated strong performance against Innovation and Availability, Scalability and Impact. The Secretariat assured the Board that, although targets were not fully met in relation to the access barriers 'Affordability' and 'Demand and Adoption', significant progress has been made in these areas. The technologies are more affordable and adopted by countries than they would have been without Unitaid's intervention. In terms of the Operational KPIs, the overall performance in 2020 was generally good, while the net level of risk to Unitaid's operations remains at a higher level than pre-pandemic. The Board Members appreciated the good progress made against the KPI J – staff satisfaction, despite not meeting the target. The Secretariat acknowledged the suggestions related to the inclusion of additional indicators for measuring quality. The Board Members expressed support for a proposal to elevate KPIs to reflect an aggregated view at the AFI level for the next strategic period. The Secretariat noted that some of the operational KPIs did not apply to COVID-19 grants as they followed different processes, however, there is no difference in the approach used for the strategic KPIs.

Some of the Board Members expressed concerns on the need for adapting the KPI indicators based on the varying nature of the grants, to which the Secretariat reaffirmed it was already being done. The Secretariat also assured the Board Members that additional support and efforts were mobilized to ensure that projects disproportionately affected by COVID-19 disruptions remain on track.

## 14. List of participants

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