

Life In Brief

Current Title: Director-General

Quick Summary

Malaria researcher-turned global health policy advisor who has pushed agenda of universal health coverage in home country of Ethiopia and at the WHO

- Gained awareness of health disparities at an early age with the loss of his brother to malaria
- Long career in Ethiopian government, where he became well-known for his involvement in expanding the country's health coverage and negotiating with African nations on regional sustainable development goals
- Leading voice on infectious disease prevention; specialized in malaria and ran Ethiopia's research and bed net programs
- Ran for director-general of the WHO on a platform of universal health care, becoming the first non-physician and first African in the role
- Experience managing epidemics including Ebola and COVID-19; stresses emergency preparedness
- Cultivates network of national and international allies in Ethiopian government, the African Union, and global health philanthropies

Approach and Motivations

Vision of universal health coverage driven by loss of brother to preventable disease

- Firmly believes health care is a fundamental human right

- His younger brother lost his life to malaria at a very young age; Tedros says he struggled to reconcile the injustice of a world where children like his brother die because they were born in an under-resourced country
- Studying in Europe and seeing universal coverage in action solidified this belief

Applies diplomatic approach to health initiatives

- Brings experience solving regional disputes from time in government; prides himself on going into the field to support WHO operations
- Stresses political selling points of universal health care, including impact on economy, security, and equality
- Described as persuasive and political leader

Policy Position and Areas of Focus

Prioritizes policies that advance health coverage and emergency preparedness

Universal Health Coverage: *Proponent of government-run health programs*

- Has pursued policies that move Ethiopia towards universal health coverage, launching initiatives to build additional health centers, train and deploy health workers, and create community-based insurance schemes
- Immediately after taking office at the WHO, made universal health coverage his primary focus; committed to helping every country implement universal health coverage by 2030, calling on nations to put an additional 1% of GDP toward primary health care

Health Emergency Response: *Experience handling Ebola and COVID-19 outbreaks; pushes investment in epidemic preparedness*

- Coordinated African Union response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, instituting travel bans and mobilizing health workers
- Established Ethiopian early warning system to detect epidemics; created program to train students in emergency management
- Has overseen the WHO management of the Kivu Ebola epidemic and COVID-19; advocates for day-to-day funding for preparedness to combat serious epidemics before they become regional or international threats

Malaria: *Carries over academic focus on malaria to policy arena*

- Contributed to malaria research, including award-winning study of malaria incidence among young people residing near dams in northern Ethiopia
- Spearheaded Ethiopia's goal of universal bed net coverage; worked with Board members at Roll Back Malaria to develop global plan and secured \$3 billion to support these programs
- As WHO Director-General, has been vocal about the fight against malaria, urging the global health community to fill critical gaps in the response and praising vaccine development

Core Communities

Wide network of African politicians and global health organizations

Ethiopian Government: *Well connected to country's health and foreign affairs bureaucrats*

- Served as Special Advisor to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn

- Network of Ambassadors from his time as foreign minister, including Konjit Sine-Giorgis and Berhanu Kebede; Ethiopia's ambassador to the UN Negash Kebret Batora stood alongside Tedros as he announced his WHO candidacy
- Hosted delegation of Ethiopian health officials at the WHO, which included friend and former Health Minister Amir Aman

African Union: *Ties to leaders all over the African continent; crucial campaign support*

- While in government, was heavily involved with the African Union, including as Chair of the Executive Council of Foreign Ministers
- During his run for WHO Director-General, received endorsements from the African Union and ministers of health from all over Africa; Chair Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma attended the official launch of his candidacy
- Chose former AU Chair President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe to serve as a WHO Goodwill Ambassador, a move that was criticized by many

Global Health Initiatives: *Forges partnerships with organizations and philanthropies to advance global health*

- Membership in various UN-affiliated public health organizations, including the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, UNAIDS, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria
- Served as a member of the High-Level Task Force for Innovative Financing for Health Systems, co-chaired by World Bank President Robert Zoellick and former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown
- Close relationship with prominent philanthropies including the Clinton Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Relevant Financial Information

No notable financial disclosures; WHO campaign was financially supported jointly by the Ethiopian Government and the East Africa Campaign Fund

Publications, Media and Speaking

Promotes views on universal health coverage on the international stage

Publications: *Has published extensively in scientific journals on infectious disease and the pathway towards universal health coverage*

- Favorite Subjects: Barriers to care, community health, malaria, HIV/AIDS
- Preferred Outlets: Medical journals including the Lancet, World Scientific, and Nature
- Co-edited *The Labor Market for Health Workers in Africa: A New Look at the Crisis*, which discusses the migration of doctors from Africa

Media: *Appears in international media to discuss public health concerns and role at the WHO*

- Favorite Subjects: Mental health, tobacco, gender equality at the WHO
- Preferred Outlets: News outlets including Al Jazeera, and media of international organizations including UNICEF, WHO, and DEVEX
- Social Media Habits: Active on Twitter and Facebook

Speaking: *Discusses the value of universal health coverage at global conferences*

- Favorite Subjects: Universal health coverage, financing health schemes, health status-related stigma

- Preferred Audience: Global conferences including the World Government Summit, the World Economic Forum, and meetings of the African Union

Family and Personal Background

Keeps low personal profile; enjoys spending time with family and learning in his free time

- Says he has little spare time, but when he does, he spends it with his wife and five children in Geneva
- An avid reader and likes to learn about world history

Criticisms and Controversies

Came under fire in 2017 over his handling of cholera epidemics in Ethiopia and Sudan

- Accused by health professionals of failing to properly classify outbreaks of the disease in order to avoid embarrassing the two countries
- One of the leading critics was Dr. David Nabarro, a rival candidate for WHO Director General, who called Tedros' actions a cover up
- Tedros denied these allegations as a "smear campaign"