Improving healthcare in Africa

Many people think of Africa as a place of poverty, isolation and rural living. It’s time to take another look. Seven of the world’s 10 fastest growing economies will be in Africa during the next five years. Across the continent, 65% of the population had a mobile phone in 2011 and more than half of Africa’s population will live in cities by 2030.

Africa is still disproportionately affected by infectious diseases that put a significant burden on struggling economies, and life expectancy in Africa is 15 years less than the global average. Malaria and other contagious, preventable diseases like HIV, tuberculosis, pneumonia and even leprosy still stand in the way of growth. In fact, 90% of global malaria deaths occur in Africa.

Noncommunicable diseases like diabetes, cancer and high blood pressure are projected to overtake communicable and nutritional diseases as the most common causes of death in Africa by 2030.

There’s no better time than now to fight for better health in Africa.

We know that innovation can be a matter of life and death. At Novartis, we are committed to applying our research and medical expertise to tropical diseases and adapting research and development to improving access to healthcare across the continent. We are also dedicated to educating the next generation of scientists, clinicians and healthcare workers in Africa, helping to ensure future research and patient care for Africa is centered in Africa.

We call on scientists and clinicians in universities, hospitals, governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations to build partnerships. Because by working together, we can dramatically improve healthcare in Africa. And that’s worth fighting for.

Expanding access to healthcare: communicable diseases and primary care

The Novartis Malaria Initiative
The Novartis Malaria Initiative is one of the largest access-to-medicine programs in the healthcare industry. The initiative focuses on improving access to treatment, helping communities deliver better healthcare, and investing in research and development. Since 2001, in collaboration with a range of public and private stakeholders, the initiative has delivered more than 500 million treatments without profit to the public sector in over 60 malaria-endemic countries. In the last two years, Novartis and our partners have discovered two new classes of antimalarial compounds and have been honored by several groups, including the United Nation’s Innovation Working Group, for our work on “SMS for Life,” a tracking system that has helped to improve access to treatment in rural Africa.
Global: Innovative e-learning tool to scale up training in childhood illnesses
To support and scale up training of health personnel working with sick children, the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (NFSD), together with the World Health Organization (WHO), developed an e-learning tool for Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI). Currently, NFSD and WHO are working with the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH) to develop a similar e-learning tool to improve and scale up training in maternal and newborn health.

East and southern Africa: psychosocial support of vulnerable children
More than 16 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV and AIDS. REPSSI, co-founded and supported by the Novartis Foundation, develops innovative tools for the psychosocial support of these children in 13 countries in southern Africa.

South Africa: supporting health workers in their fight against tuberculosis
Sandoz, the generics division of Novartis, in partnership with the South African Department of Health, has provided motorcycles to health workers to enable them to visit people in their homes in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. The purpose of the project is to increase the detection of new tuberculosis (TB) cases, and to encourage patients who are on TB medication to complete the six-month treatment course.

Mali: access to primary healthcare services
The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development improves access to primary healthcare services by strengthening community-based health insurance, improving the quality of care and supporting women’s financial planning and saving groups.

Zambia: establishing Health Shops in rural areas
Together with the Zambian government, Sandoz expands healthcare access by establishing Health Shops across Zambia and supplying these shops with high-quality, affordable medicines. The first shop was opened near Livingstone in August 2012. These shops serve as the primary healthcare providers in rural areas.

East Africa: first Bioequivalence Center in Ethiopia
The first regional Bioequivalence (BE) Center in East Africa, based in Addis Ababa, was officially inaugurated in November 2012. Sandoz and Novartis affiliate 1 A Pharma provided technical and capital support to set-up the BE Center for the East Africa region. The BE center will work to ascertain the therapeutic equivalence of generic drug products against those of the brand/innovator products in healthy human volunteers as per the specifications of the WHO and hence help improve health services in the regions.

Alcon in Africa: improving eye care across the continent
Alcon, the eye care division of Novartis, sponsors a number of NGO programs through its foundation, ranging from caring for glaucoma patients in Ethiopia and supporting nonprofit Mercy Ships that deliver healthcare to remote locations, to training eye care professionals in Sierra Leone and treating an anticipated 100,000 patients through 100 medical mission teams across sub-Saharan Africa.
Expanding access to healthcare: noncommunicable diseases

Zambia: asthma project at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka
In 2006, Novartis initiated a clinical epidemiology and training program at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, Zambia. Providing expertise from its Research and Pharmaceuticals divisions, free medicines from Sandoz, as well as funding from the Novartis Foundation, this effort changed medical practice regarding the treatment of asthma in Zambia.

Kenya: building a center for kidney transplantation
Working with the Kenyatta National Hospital, Novartis has established a kidney transplant center in Nairobi in 2010. The goal of the center is to increase access to transplant treatment and improve the quality of life of patients with kidney failure.

Nigeria: fighting breast cancer
The Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research (NIBR) is working with the University of Chicago, Broad Institute, Lagos University and Ibadan University to better understand the genetics of breast cancer in Nigerian women who suffer from an aggressive form of the disease. This effort includes strengthening research infrastructure in the two University hospitals through training and equipment transfers, assistance with sample preparation and analysis and genetic analysis, as well as education on targeted cancer therapies.

Zambia: addressing rheumatic heart disease in Lusaka
Working with the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, NIBR initiated an effort to determine the prevalence and monitor treatment of children with rheumatic heart disease (RHD). In this study, 10,000 school-age children in Lusaka will be tested for RHD using echocardiography and the data entered into an electronic registry. Children with streptococcal throat infections will be treated with injectable penicillin and those who are diagnosed with RHD will be put on long-term penicillin prophylaxis. Adherence and effectiveness of treatment will be monitored through the electronic registry. This study will also raise awareness of RHD with the ultimate goal of eradicating the disease, a major cause of morbidity and mortality in children above the age of five in sub-Saharan Africa.

Zambia: improving cardiovascular health
Working with the Ministry of Health and the Teaching University Hospital, NIBR delivered a cardiovascular training during the 2012 annual meeting of the Zambian Medical Association in Livingstone. Attended by 90 physicians from across the country this event was the first in a series of workshops to train Zambian physicians in the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular diseases. Following these trainings, Sandoz will train doctors from provincial hospitals to run cardiovascular clinics being established in Zambia, with the goal of “training the trainer.”
Supporting scientific education and research

Novartis offers training in drug discovery and clinical trials to scientists and physicians. In 2012, more than 500 individuals participated in Novartis workshops held across sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, we bring scientists from Africa to train in our labs in Switzerland, the US, Italy and Singapore, and we learn as much from them as they do from us. Upon training completion, scientists return to their home country to continue research to address diseases in African populations.

Tanzanian Training Centre for International Health

The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (NFSD) has worked with the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute since the 1960s to build up the Tanzanian Training Centre for International Health (TTCIH) in Ifakara, Tanzania. TTCIH has become one of the highest-quality training institutions in East Africa, and is working toward becoming financially self-sufficient.

The first drug discovery and development center in Africa

With support from the Novartis Research Foundation, Novartis has partnered with H3D, the first drug discovery and development center on the African continent. H3D focuses on malaria and TB research, and is located in Cape Town, South Africa. The partnership includes infrastructure support, scientific exchange and research collaborations between NIBR and H3D.

Master of Science program in clinical vaccinology

Working with the University of Siena, Italy, the Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics Division offers a two-year Master of Science program in vaccinology for physicians from Nigeria, Ethiopia and other sub-Saharan countries. To date more than 20 physicians have enrolled in the program.

Learning by sharing to better fight malaria

In 2006, the Novartis Malaria Initiative introduced workshops with managers of National Malaria Control Programs (NMCP) in Africa. NMCPs, usually a part of the Ministry of Health, are charged with overseeing malaria control interventions by setting national standards and providing guidelines and technical assistance.