In many resource-constrained countries, supply chain problems make it difficult to get essential medicines and healthcare commodities to patients in a timely fashion, particularly those living in remote areas. Barriers include high stock-outs at rural health facilities, limited visibility of available medicines to district management, leading to inaccurate forecasting and emergency situations.

Together with public and private partners, Novartis is leading SMS for Life to improve access to essential medicines in rural public health facilities in developing countries. Initially launched in 2009 to help prevent stock-outs of antimalarials in Tanzania, SMS for Life has since been rolled out in more than 10,000 public health facilities in Kenya, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon. Over the years, the scope of the program has also expanded to more disease areas and health parameters.

Building on the success of SMS for Life, a new enhanced version, SMS for Life 2.0 was launched in 2016.

**How the system works**

The solution is based on the use of simple and affordable technologies such as mobile phones, smartphones and tablet computers. It allows health facilities that dispense essential medicines to report their stock levels to the district medical officers who are responsible for treatment availability.

In addition to stock visibility, the system enables to collect timely disease surveillance data, hence allowing local, regional and national public health actors to monitor and support the operations in the primary health facilities. Ultimately, this helps to better assess the adequacy of the resource allocation with the actual needs and make fact-based decisions.

The tablet-based platform also offers training programs and educational video resources, jointly developed with local health authorities, to support the continuous education of health workers.
Integrating SMS for Life into a country’s health information system and strategy

The data collected by SMS for Life can be integrated into a country’s health information system and strategy. Implementation is tailored to the specific needs and priorities of individual countries, and the system is flexible, meaning it can be expanded to any number of health facilities, countries, programs, stock items or disease surveillance data.

**SMS for Life 2.0 offers enhanced functionalities**

SMS for Life 2.0 was launched in December 2016 in Kaduna State, Nigeria’s third most populous region, together with the Kaduna State Ministry of Health and Vodacom. The new program addresses key operational challenges at peripheral healthcare facilities (dispensaries, health posts, healthcare and medical centers) in the state.

Using smartphones and tablet computers, local healthcare workers can track stock levels of essential antimalarial vaccines and medicines, HIV and TB treatments, and send notifications to district medical officers when stock levels are low. Tablet computers also allow for disease monitoring by supporting data collection of basic disease parameters in line with a country’s needs. The program also monitors surveillance parameters of malaria, maternal and infant deaths and seven other diseases, including measles, yellow fever and cholera. In addition, SMS for Life 2.0 enables training of healthcare workers in local facilities using on-demand eLearning modules. These resources can also be used to increase public awareness on health topics.

Further Novartis signed a memorandum of understanding with the Zambian Ministry of Health to deploy SMS for Life 2.0 in up to 500 health facilities in the country’s northern provinces. The program, which includes stock reporting, disease surveillance and eLearning, was developed in cooperation with Vodacom and launched at the end of 2017.

SMS for Life 2.0 is also under discussion in other sub-Saharan African countries. Further, the system could be extended to treatments against noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes or high-blood pressure. A first roll out of an extended version will be launched in Pakistan in 2018 to register patients and enable accurate medicine stock management from warehouse to dispensing pharmacies.

SMS for Life is part of Novartis Social Business, a unit which includes Novartis Access, the Novartis Malaria Initiative, the Novartis Healthy Family programs and Sandoz NGO Supply.

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