

## India-Africa Cooperation in the Healthcare Sector

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India and Africa share historical ties and many commonalities including a colonial past. India and Africa have been engaging with each other regularly since India's independence in every sphere ranging from trade, culture, education and in recent years in the energy, agricultural and healthcare sectors. Africa comprises 54 countries, each with a unique and diverse economy, political structure and developmental trajectory. Africa is growing rapidly and is rich in natural resources and raw materials which are in high demand and all major powers are vying for influence in Africa. Africa, on the other hand, would like to chart its own course and decide on its future without any external pressures. The African Union (AU), established in 2002, has enabled the integration of African countries and created a pan African platform to articulate the views and concerns of Member States and provide leverage in international trade and economic negotiations.

Providing universal quality healthcare to their populace, who face similar challenges, is of prime concern to India and Africa and the health agendas of both India and Africa are reflective of this. The AU Summit in 2015 outlined an Agenda 2063 to achieve a more

prosperous Africa through inclusive and sustainable development. The main element of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 and of Agenda 2063 is to ensure good health and wellness of all citizens by 2063 through access to affordable and quality health care services. India too is committed to the SDGs and set out its vision in the health care sector in its National Health Policy 2017 to attain 'the highest possible level of good health and well being through a preventive and promotive health care orientation in all development policies, and universal access to good quality health care services without anyone having to face financial hardship as a consequence'. This has been factored into the India- Africa development cooperation in the health sector keeping in mind the areas where Indian experience and remedies could be most suitably adapted to Africa's healthcare needs.

Through various departments, the Government of India has put in place mechanisms to enhance its engagement with African countries through, for example, the triennial India-Africa Summits, the Duty-free Tariff Preference Scheme for LDCs, and the Pan African e-Network (PAeN). The PAeN, set up in 2009 aims to share India's expertise in tele-education, tele-medicine and ICT services to overcome challenges in the healthcare sector and in capacity building through continuing medical education lectures in super speciality courses as per AU requirement. The tele-medicine component, which connects remote hospitals in 53 countries in Africa to 12 Indian hospitals has been fairly successful in bringing free medical consultations from eminent doctors/specialists in India to patients across Africa.

Major diseases have afflicted the lives of the African people hampering progress and wellbeing. In its efforts to eradicate disease, Africa has procured generic and branded pharmaceutical products from India at a much lower cost as compared to those from the western countries. This has brought down the incidence and spread of diseases like HIV, Meningitis, Malaria, TB, etc. and saved many lives in Africa. Indian companies, like Cipla Ltd and Serum Institute of India, led campaigns and played a crucial role in making affordable medicines and vaccines available in African countries for the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS and Meningitis leading to a marked decline in their incidence, spread and fatalities. Indian enterprises have invested in Africa in the healthcare sector, including setting up of hospitals to bring quality healthcare to the people of Africa, which has been welcomed. For instance, Dr Aggarwal's Eye Centres are in ten countries and Apollo hospitals in six countries. Medical tourism from Africa to avail of affordable medical care in India has increased in recent years as also the temporary movement of Indian doctors and nurses to Africa for short term assignments.

India and Africa are natural trade partners with sea trade going back to many centuries. India's trade with Africa has grown steadily over the years and India is now the second largest trading partner with sub-Saharan Africa as per the World Bank. Bilateral trade was estimated to be \$ 62 billion witnessing a 22 percent growth in 2018 and investments of around \$ 55 billion were made by Indian companies in crucial sectors including healthcare. Some of the major Indian pharmaceutical joint ventures or subsidiaries

manufacturing or trading in Africa are Cipla Ltd., Ranbaxy Laboratories, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, IPCA Laboratories, Parenteral Drugs, Emcure Pharmaceutical Ltd., Aurobindo Pharma Ltd., J B Chemicals, Cadila Healthcare, Lupin Ltd. and Intas Pharmaceutical Ltd. thereby making available affordable branded and generic drugs in the African market. Africa and India both have rich traditional medicine systems and these have been integrated to some extent into the modern medicine systems and sharing of experience, expertise and know-how in this area could lead to a win-win outcome in healthcare for both the Indian and African people.

An important step in enhancing engagement with Africa has been the triennial Summits. In order to carry forward the strategic vision of the India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) III through a structured and concrete partnership in the Health sector, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in partnership with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), held first India- Africa Health Sciences meet in 2016 in New Delhi. Following this meeting, ICMR initiated the move to strengthen cooperation in a structured manner by establishing an India-Africa Health Sciences Collaborative Platform (IAHSP). Pursuant to this, an MOU was signed between the AU and India (ICMR) in March 2019 to pave the way for cooperation in the areas of research & development, capacity building, health services, pharmaceutical trade and manufacturing capabilities for drugs and diagnostics. Implementing this important MOU will be a crucial milestone in the healthcare collaboration with Africa which will be mutually beneficial.

India's pharmaceutical sector plays a key role in Africa's healthcare sector through local manufacturing of some drugs and medical devices creating employment and building capacity and it is a major supplier of formulations and bulk drugs to Africa. India and Africa, facing similar healthcare issues, can work together, share experiences and learn from each other on how to tackle and mitigate the increasing threats to people's health. With the signing of the MOU and establishing the IAHSP, cooperation in this sector is expected to get a further boost and joint R&D initiatives will create a new paradigm in the important area of finding solutions to combat common threats from new and emerging diseases, epidemics, pandemics, etc. India and Africa together can chart a new path for a sustainable and disease free world in the coming years.



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