

Briefing No. 1

The Touch Foundation

Improving lives through better healthcare

Many of the severe health crises in sub-Saharan Africa are caused or exacerbated by the chronic lack of health workers. Since 2004, the Touch Foundation has worked to identify innovative solutions to these complex health problems in sub-Saharan Africa, using Tanzania as a base. During this time we have worked with our Tanzanian partners to massively expand a regional medical training college and teaching hospital in rural Tanzania from just ten to eight hundred students, across eight professional specialties. This success prompted the Tanzanian government to request that the Touch Foundation create a national expansion plan for health worker training.

Our results have been possible because we utilize the best management skills from business and bring together key partnerships with institutions such as McKinsey & Company and Weill Cornell Medical College in New York. Our goals are not unusual, but our approach is said to be inventive and pioneering. In the end, our real goal is to make ourselves redundant, leaving behind a sustainable and functioning health care system that trains and retains sufficient health workers to serve their communities. We believe that this model might then be replicated across Africa.

THE CRISIS

There are only 26,000 health care workers to administer care to over forty million Tanzanians – 84,000 fewer than the number of workers recommended by the World Health Organization. It is clear that more doctors, nurses and other health workers are needed in order to offer basic primary care and reach targets for certain key health indicators outlined in the Millennium Development Goals, including maternal mortality rates, tuberculosis prevalence, and AIDS-related deaths.

THE CHALLENGE

The international community has donated hundreds of millions of dollars to improve health outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa, and African leaders have pledged to dramatically increase their domestic spending on healthcare. However, many of these programs have targeted specific diseases without necessarily ensuring that the hospitals and wider health systems are equipped or in place to handle such resources. Crucially, more health workers are required for the creation of a viable national health care system that saves and improves many more lives.

THE ROLE OF THE TOUCH FOUNDATION

We have taken a three-pronged approach to the health crisis in Tanzania: building a university from the ground up, using that knowledge to assist the government to plan rapid-scale expansion of training across the country, and determining the key impediments to health system recovery in a third of the country.

Building a University

At the Weill Bugando University College of Health Sciences, the Touch Foundation is working in collaboration with local leaders to radically expand and strengthen what has become the second largest medical school in Tanzania. The university is affiliated with one of the largest teaching hospitals in the country, the Bugando Medical Centre, serving a population of fifteen million people in the Lake Zone region.

We are helping both the university and hospital to improve administrative systems, facilitate strategic planning, assess systemic obstacles, fund expansion projects, and develop collaborative relationships. These activities are radically expanding the number of health workers that can be trained and then serve in the region.

Developing the Workforce

Based on our progress at Weill Bugando, the Tanzanian health minister asked that we develop a plan for the national expansion of health worker training. Supported by a pro bono team from McKinsey, we analyzed the growth potential of different training schools and developed a practical step-by-step action plan by which Tanzania could at least double training capacity, as well as a planning tool to link construction of new facilities to available staff. Our findings and recommendations – known as the *Twiga Initiative* – were immediately adopted as operational policy by the government.

Transforming Healthcare

Health workers require functioning health systems – i.e. well managed hospitals and clinics, appropriate referral procedures, drugs, equipment, and transportation. Again, in conjunction with a McKinsey health systems team, we conducted an intensive review of the health system in the Lake Zone region through field visits, focus group sessions, data collection and analysis. The team developed seven key interventions, which, if implemented, will enable or stimulate significant improvement of the health system. Our staff in Mwanza, Tanzania continue to work with the local health leadership on implementation of these activities. The first initiatives will target health worker retention, eLearning, mobile primary care, and workforce productivity.

TAKING ACTION

We work closely with governments, companies, foundations and many individual supporters to create practical and effective solutions to the healthcare crisis in sub-Saharan Africa. To find out what part you can play in this work please contact Lee Wells, Director of External Affairs, on +44 (0) 207 961 5629 or by email to lee_wells@mckinsey.com.

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