

Briefing No. 4**Investing in health care systems
Lessons from the Lake Zone Initiative**

Efforts in Africa to tackle diseases like malaria are severely inhibited by the weak capacity of health care systems to support targeted interventions. A significant challenge to improvement is the extraordinary complexity of the problem – determining the root causes of the problem and what should be fixed first is not a straightforward exercise. The Touch Foundation, with partners such as McKinsey & Company, has identified these causes through a diagnostic analysis in one third of Tanzania, and developed a number of targeted initiatives that, with appropriate support, can deliver the greatest and most immediate impact for the population.

THE CRISIS

Poor health outcomes, due to diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, are well documented and international efforts have been mobilized to address them. However, many countries in the region will struggle to meet the three health-related Millennium Development Goals. It is increasingly clear that progress can only be made if health systems are strengthened – this means addressing inadequate facilities, poor infrastructure (including a lack of water and electricity), deficiencies in equipment and drugs and the processes to manage them, as well as ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of well-trained health workers.

THE CHALLENGE

There are two significant challenges for countries like Tanzania as they seek to address the myriad of problems that affect their health care systems. First, the complexity of the situation makes understanding the root causes extremely difficult. Given endemic poverty and disease, poor infrastructure and inadequate numbers of trained staff, it is challenging to clearly identify the complex array of root causes and determine their impact.

The second key challenge is that when confronted with massive challenges on all fronts, even when the causes are understood, it is extremely difficult to determine what to do first. The challenge in Tanzania has been to determine the most effective, practical, and sustainable interventions that can be made and in what order.

THE ROLE OF THE TOUCH FOUNDATION

The Touch Foundation has been working on this problem with McKinsey & Company, supporters such as the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, the Tanzanian government and healthcare providers in the Lake Zone region of Tanzania (a largely rural population of 15 million people). The initial result is the Lake Zone Initiative, a diagnostic study and detailed work plan that aims to deliver care to an additional 3.4 million people across the region. It involved over two hundred site visits to regional and district hospitals

as well as basic primary care clinics in rural areas. Consequently the report identifies four root causes that are inhibiting expansion and improvement of health care delivery to patients:

- *Insufficient investment* – both public and private
- *Weak management* – especially of supply chain logistics, operations, and health workers
- *Inadequate resource allocation to primary care*
- *A lack of system enablers* – like pre-payment systems such as insurance

Key initiatives

We developed over thirty initiatives to directly address these root causes. Mindful of limited available resources, we prioritized the seven initiatives that, if implemented first, would deliver the greatest impact in respect of improving basic services:

- *Retention of health workers in rural areas* – provision of incentives, professional development and networking would help retain critical workers
- *On-the-job health worker training* – electronic learning would help train workers in the workplace (as opposed to offsite trainings), gaining productivity and refreshing critical skills
- *Creation of mobile primary care services* – delivering care where it is needed to ensure coverage of more communities
- *Transformation of the supply chain* – addition of a vertically integrated privately operated supplier ensuring better logistics management
- *Development of independent, owner-operated or franchised primary care dispensaries*
- *Performance management programs at primary care facilities*
- *Performance management programs for hospitals*

Clearly these seven initiatives do not offer a complete solution to health system weaknesses, but they can make a dramatic impact, expanding health coverage to an additional 3.4 million people. The vast majority of these additional patients will be treated at the primary care level, providing patients with better access to care and faster treatment. Moreover, these patients will not then crowd regional and tertiary hospitals, leaving those facilities more time to dedicate to specialist care for those who need it.

Implementation requires collaboration between local authorities, national government and additional expert partners from business and the public sector. The Touch Foundation is working to create such partnerships and to recruit partners who see the Lake Zone Initiative as a road map for delivering better health care, not only in this area of Tanzania but beyond.

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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