



The Private Sector as a Key Partner in Health System Strengthening

Leveraging business capabilities to improve health and resilience in low- and middle-income countries

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A country's ability to provide high-quality, equitable health services is fundamental to ensuring good health, well-being, and long-term prosperity. Strong public health systems are critical to ending the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria; the resilience needed to prepare for and respond to future pandemics;¹ and achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC)² – three essential goals for global health and development.

People access and receive health care through various avenues, including government-run facilities, community systems, faith-based clinics and hospitals, and private providers.

The private sector, which includes companies from various industries, plays multiple roles in helping to build and sustain resilient health systems. In particular, the private sector is indispensable for bringing innovation that is essential – in medicine, technology, transport and many other areas – to meet communities' health needs, including during a health emergency.³ Across diverse industries, companies are leveraging their distinct expertise and resources to help build local capacity to deliver high quality health services, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

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As an important part of the health ecosystem, the private sector has both an interest and a responsibility to collaborate with governments, civil society and communities, sharing expertise and assistance needed to ensure that health services are available to everyone, free of discrimination. Innovation therefore needs to be coupled with equitable access to advance global health and equity.

[Friends of the Global Fight](#), the [Private Sector Roundtable on Global Health Security \(PSRT\)](#), and [Rabin Martin](#) work closely with many companies to support their contributions in addressing urgent global health challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes but is not limited to *goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*, and *goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*. This issue brief highlights varied examples of how companies are actively involved in:



Strengthening resiliency, especially related to the health care workforce



Increasing access to health technologies and services



Enhancing the provision of health care in resource-constrained settings

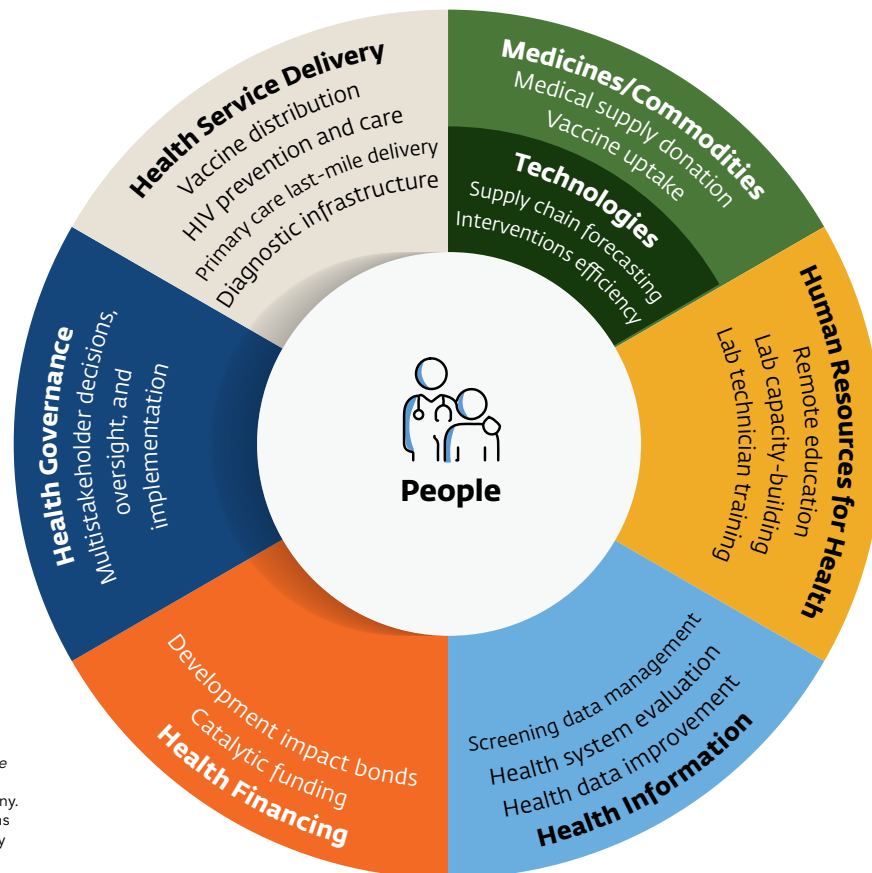
While this brief is not intended to be a comprehensive review, these examples highlight the value of the private sector – working with governments and communities – to expand the reach of and improve the quality of health services. The brief is a starting place from which to spur further efforts to build partnerships and work across sectors to improve well-being for all.

Efforts to improve the delivery of vital health services can and should leverage the private sector's expertise, capabilities, and resources. Companies have a vested interest in being part of a whole of society approach to help build resilient health systems. Many companies are global employers, vendors, and suppliers, and work across multiple geographies. A health threat in one region can have serious spillover effects, upsetting the lives of millions of employees and customers and their families, disrupting global and regional supply chains, and weakening economies.⁴ Ensuring that countries can respond effectively is essential for conducting business as well as meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Collaboration is key. Formalizing partnerships among the business community, governments, and civil society will maximize the reach and impact of health-related innovations from R&D investments in product innovation, developing new medicines, vaccines, and diagnostics, to making health products and services more widely accessible for people who need them.

How the private sector is strengthening health systems around the world

The World Health Organization has identified six building blocks for strong, people-centered health systems. Private companies are making concrete, high-impact contributions to each of these essential elements of strong health systems in low- and middle-income countries.



Source: World Health Organization. *Everybody's business: Strengthening health systems to improve health outcomes: WHO's framework for action*. 2007. Cited in Adam, Taghreed and Don de Savigny. "Systems thinking for strengthening health systems in LMICs: need for a paradigm shift." *Health Policy and Planning* 27, no. suppl_4 (October 2012): iv1-iv3. DOI: 10.1093/heapol/czs084.

Health service delivery

The private sector is supporting the delivery of essential health services, from vaccines to diagnostics to care and treatment.

The **UPS Foundation** leverages its expertise to deliver medicine and health supplies to the most remote communities in Africa. The Foundation provides tools and training to build health care workers' capacity in how to handle complex ultra-cold chain vaccines, enabling them to treat the most vulnerable populations and expand healthcare coverage and access. Through its efforts, UPS delivered more than 50 million COVID-19 vaccine doses during the pandemic and provided over 100 ultra-cold freezers across the continent.⁵

During a six-month period when the COVID-19 pandemic created major barriers to delivering health services and burdening communities, **ViiV Healthcare's** Community Response Fund (CRF) reached nearly half a million people with HIV prevention, care, and treatment through its partnerships with a diverse range of civil society leaders in 36 countries.⁶

Gilead Sciences is part of a four-year public-private collaboration with Harvard Medical School and local governments to help address barriers that limit viral hepatitis diagnosis and care at primary healthcare facilities in Vietnam and the Philippines.⁷ This initiative focuses on reaching individuals at the last mile of service delivery to ensure better viral hepatitis care, through person-centered innovation.⁸

Through a longstanding public-private partnership model with Tanzania's national government, **Abbott** has strengthened the country's public laboratory services by modernizing the diagnostics infrastructure in 23 regional laboratories, thus improving screening and diagnostic services for millions of people across the country who have HIV, diabetes and other chronic diseases.⁹

Medicines and technologies

In low- and middle-income countries, companies consistently strive to speed up access to critical vaccines and other tools to prevent disease, diagnostics for testing, and treatments. Affordability is a crucial factor in equitable access to medicines and health care.

I: Medicines and vital commodities

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) has supported national efforts to scale up immunization through Vxnaid, its open-source digital vaccination monitoring platform that includes a dashboard to ensure administration of the correct vaccines, up-to-date information on progress toward national vaccination campaign goals, and community engagement tools to keep in touch with participants. Through a partnership with Rwanda's Ministry of Health, J&J trained personnel in vaccinating over 200,000 individuals with its two-dose Ebola vaccine regimen, demonstrating over 94% adherence.¹⁰

Chevron assisted various countries' over-stretched health systems to meet the challenge of COVID-19. It donated hospital beds in Indonesia; intensive care equipment, ambulances, medical and laboratory equipment and supplies, thermoscanners, pyrometers, and personal protective equipment (PPE) in Kazakhstan; and a variety of medical supplies in Thailand.¹¹



II. Technologies

Technological innovations proved pivotal in the delivery of health services during COVID-19, and these innovations continue to improve service delivery even as the health burden associated with the pandemic has eased. Accelerating the introduction of health technologies and services is essential where there is clear demand and pressing public health need.¹²

Dimagi, Inc., as a for-profit social enterprise, created CommCare, a widely deployed, evidence-based platform to support scalable interventions of frontline health workers.¹³ CommCare has been integrated across Burkino Faso's health system, supporting triage, counseling, training, and case management for Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses. It rapidly pivoted in 2020 to respond to urgent COVID-19 needs by enabling screening and triage guides, counseling and community sensitization, and e-learning for health care workers.¹⁴

Pendulum, a technology company that uses artificial intelligence to strengthen supply chains, has partnered with the Ministry of Health of Cote d'Ivoire to improve forecasting and supply planning for 11 family planning commodities at health facilities across the country. Learning from data from over 2500 health facilities over 6 years, Pendulum predicts monthly consumption 38% more accurately than the 3-month rolling average, better ensuring service delivery points have the commodities they need when they need them. Pendulum's forecasts are integrated into the health system's mobile ordering platform, mSupply, so that health workers can easily access forecasts as part of their normal workflow when ordering products each month.¹⁵



Human resources for health

Many companies are building the capacity of the most important single component of health systems – the health workforce.

Roche has trained more than 8,300 laboratory professionals in sub-Saharan Africa in its Johannesburg training site, helping the region close workforce gaps for lab technicians. Roche has invested in a new diagnostics R&D and manufacturing site in Cape Town, South Africa, enabling quality manufacturing on the continent, with personnel in South Africa. The site supplies genomic sequencing kits to Africa, the Asia Pacific, the Americas and Europe.¹⁶

Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD) collaborated with the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ministries of health in a public-private partnership called "Labs for Life," to strengthen laboratory systems in countries across Africa and Asia. Since 2007, Labs for Life has provided frontline training for laboratory staff in seven countries with high rates of HIV. BD contributed personnel time through trainers, mentors and subject matter experts, and deployed more than 300 BD Global Health Fellows to short-term, in-country assignments.¹⁷

In the area of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), **Viatrix**, in partnership with the American College of Cardiology, NCD Alliance, World Heart Federation and other partners, leveraged advances in communications technology to provide remote learning to health care professionals via the NCD Academy. Classes are provided in multiple languages and more than 19,000 health workers, who report serving nearly 50 million patients, have an active NCD Academy account.¹⁸ The NCD Academy curriculum will now address linkages to infectious diseases.

Health information

A number of companies are helping low- and middle-income countries collect and use data to improve health outcomes. Among other benefits, health systems that have accurate forecasts of demand for supplies and services are better able to meet public health needs in a timely fashion.

Novartis partnered with **Dimagi** and the **Sickle Cell Foundation of Ghana** on a digital tool to support data management associated with newborn screening for Sickle Cell Disease. The app provides seamless data sharing among birth centers, newborn screening laboratories and regional newborn screening coordinating centers, and helps facilitate proper follow up treatment and continuity of care. The app is now expanding to six other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and has been used as part of the data gathering process for the screening of over 90,000 newborns.¹⁹

Using WHO's Dynamic Preparedness Metric, **Qlik** developed an interactive data analytics platform to be available on the WHO's Strategic Partnership for Health Security portal to help countries gauge health system capacity and the state of health system preparedness. Collecting data on early-stage respiratory, diarrheal, neurologic, hemorrhagic and acute febrile syndromes, this dynamic tool proactively informs decisions and action plans to improve health system capacity and respond to epidemics and other health emergencies.²⁰

Another innovative health information platform developed by **Zenysis**, a big data and artificial intelligence startup, uses data to improve health system performance in more than 10 countries. In Rwanda, the platform integrates data from 13 separate information systems into one unified view, facilitating monitoring and decision-making with tools and dashboards powered by advanced analytics. As the government's core health sector analytical tool, the platform has led to improved service delivery and reduced data quality issues nation-wide.²¹



Health financing

Private companies are also contributing substantial financing for health programs in low- and middle-income countries. With mounting debt, low- and middle-income countries face shrinking budgets, exacerbating a pre-COVID-19 health financing gap, to meet health needs. The private sector is helping to address that gap through catalytic funds and partnerships. For example, for the seventh replenishment of the **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund)** in 2022, private sector partners (including private philanthropic foundations) pledged a record \$1.23 billion over three years – a 10% increase over the previous replenishment.²² The Fund contributes to scaling innovation in areas like digital health, community health, laboratory systems and gender equality and human rights – increasing impact and cost effectiveness of investments.

Johnson & Johnson Foundation provided \$15 million of the initial \$25 million committed by companies and philanthropies to launch the Africa Frontline First Catalytic Fund, which is part of the Global Fund, which matched it 1:1.²³ This catalytic fund seeks to mobilize at least \$100 million to provide financing to accelerate and sustain the scaleup of a professionalized community health workforce in 10 African countries.²⁴



MSD, through its MSD for Mothers initiative, collaborated with USAID, UBS Optimus Foundation, and others to create Utkrisht, the world's first development impact bond for maternal health, to improve the quality of private maternity care in India, where many women across all economic strata seek care. This unique public-private partnership created a financing instrument that links payments to results, paving the way for a more sustainable approach to financing health care.²⁵



Health governance

As global health governance has become increasingly inclusive in recent decades,²⁶ private companies and foundations have become actively engaged in health-related governing bodies, providing valuable knowledge and experience.

The private sector is one of several constituencies represented on the board of the **Global Fund** since its inception in 2002.²⁷ Similarly, the private sector is represented by the **PSRT** as a Steering Committee member of the Global Health Security Agenda, which is a group of more than 70 countries and international organizations linked by their common vision to achieve a world safe from global health threats.²⁸ Additionally, representatives of the vaccine industry from the southern and northern hemispheres serve on the Board of **Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance**.²⁹

The private sector is also contributing to national health governance. For example, the governing body of South Africa's HIV response, the South African National AIDS Council, includes regular input and advice through its private sector forum. Similarly, the Global Fund requires that its multistakeholder committees (called Country Coordination Mechanisms) include private sector members along with public health authorities, civil society and others in implementing countries.³⁰ Both at the board and in-country levels, the Global Fund offers a governance model for the future in including the private sector in multistakeholder deliberations, decisions, oversight and implementation.

A call to action: Scale up partnerships among the private sector, governments, and communities to build strong, resilient health systems

With half of the world's population lacking access to essential health services,³¹ it is clear that the international community must leverage every available asset to strengthen health systems and meet the needs of people around the world. In the quest to end the epidemics of AIDS, TB and malaria; better prepare, prevent and respond to health emergencies; achieve Universal Health Coverage; and reduce health disparities, the private sector across various industries has unique strengths to contribute as an essential partner to government and communities.

Governments, multilateral institutions, civil society organizations and the business community should collaborate to achieve the collective goal of strong, resilient health systems.

Governments, multilateral institutions and civil society can:

- Establish mechanisms to actively involve the private sector in global, regional, and country-level health and pandemic preparedness planning, investment, and engagement strategies as valued partners.
- Integrate private sector constituent groups in the governance of global health initiatives, along with other essential partners such as civil society and affected communities.
- Collaborate with the business community to improve and broaden the reach of health services and infrastructure to advance equitable access to innovation, including creating and leveraging digital tools to achieve UHC.
- Make universal access to health care a priority and a core principle, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- Encourage development finance institutions – such as the World Bank's International Finance Corporation and U.S. International Development Finance Corporation – to collaborate more with private investors on innovative ways to mobilize more financing for health and more health improvement and access per dollar.³²
- Create clearer and more transparent domestic and international regulations, and regulatory harmonization where possible, to foster a supportive environment for health systems strengthening, including, where appropriate, streamlining licensing, permits and approvals that facilitate businesses' ability to increase access to their services.
- Collaborate with the private sector to encourage continued investment in innovative health care solutions.

The private sector can:

- Contribute its distinct expertise and capabilities to build health care capacity at the global, regional, national and local levels in support of governments' and communities' health priorities--notably supply chain management, digital technology, and service delivery.
- Collaborate with governments and communities to share expertise that advances equitable access to innovation and broadens the reach of health services and infrastructure.
- Leverage its trusted voice to communicate evidence-based and culturally appropriate public health messaging to employees worldwide.
- Speak out against health disinformation as well as discrimination in health care delivery.
- Advocate for greater investment in health by LMIC governments and global donors.
- Advance innovative financing, by collaborating more with development finance institutions.
- Make universal access to health care a priority and a core principle, ensuring that no one is left behind--prioritizing affordability of medicines, technologies, diagnostics and services to more people, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

If governments, the business community and other partners take these steps, low and middle-income countries will have stronger health systems that are able to deliver more equitable care – leading to improved health for all. Working collaboratively, the public, nonprofit and private sectors, along with local communities, can achieve the global imperatives of universal health coverage, ending existing epidemics, and preventing and preparing for future health emergencies.

About:

Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is the leading U.S.-based advocate for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund), the largest global health funder in the world. Founded in 2004, Friends mobilizes a diverse group of partners to drive U.S. support for the Global Fund and U.S. leadership on global health.

The Private Sector Roundtable (PSRT) is a coalition of companies from diverse industries – health care, logistics, communications, technology, and energy – that are committed to strengthening health security at the global, regional, national, and local level. For more information and membership inquiries, please contact the PSRT at PSRT@globalhealthsecurity.net.

Rabin Martin serves as the Secretariat for the PSRT. Rabin Martin is a team of global health impact consultants driving better outcomes, access and equity – from strategy to execution. For more information, please contact info@rabinmartin.com.

Endnotes

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