

Making healthcare sustainable in the developing world

Today, many companies are trying to solve global health challenges through philanthropy. However, it has become clear that philanthropy alone is no longer enough to make a lasting impact.

By [Mark Halper](#) | Oct 27, 2013

Joe Jimenez, CEO of Novartis, explains “Traditional corporate-responsibility efforts do not address the root cause of the problem, which is much deeper than a pricing issue.” Under Jimenez’s leadership, Novartis is using a combination of philanthropy, zero profit, and Social Ventures to create long-lasting solutions for global health. Social ventures are innovative business models that build local, sustainable capabilities for healthcare. They are uniquely tailored to local customs and health priorities, and focus on addressing larger societal challenges including health education, infrastructure and distribution networks.



VIDEO

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Joe Jimenez, CEO of Novartis

Launched in India in 2007, Arogya Parivar, which means “Healthy Family” in Hindi, is one example of Novartis’ Social Venture approach. The program, which became self-sustaining in less than three years, covers 11 therapeutic areas and offers 80 effective, low-cost medications for diseases that are prevalent in rural India. Its 500 traveling health educators and sales supervisors have become a welcome sight in 33,000 Indian villages, home to 42 million people.

Novartis deploys these on-the-ground educational teams to lay the groundwork for the company to provide affordable drugs and vaccines to treat and prevent a range of conditions — from common colds, aches and pains to hepatitis B and tuberculosis. Similar Social Ventures are now also being piloted in Kenya, Indonesia and Vietnam, with more countries to come.

A significant part of the program focuses on investment in education because the best medicines in the world might not work if basic sanitation and health practices are not in place. As Jimenez notes, “Free medicines are only part of the solution. We need to go beyond donations and reduced-pricing schemes to build sustainable health-care systems with strong distribution channels and education programs for the public and for health-care workers. Without these components, the model collapses.”

Educators use storytelling to help engage villagers in the lessons. “One of the biggest issues in the villages is still awareness,” says Joseph Samuel, the deputy head of social marketing and alliances for Arogya Parivar. “Diarrhea is one of the biggest killers in India, where 30 percent of the disease burden comes from unsafe water.”

China: Health training for children, adults and doctors

In northwestern China, full-time Novartis educators are spread out in the vast, remote, mountainous province of Xinjiang, tutoring about health through a Social Ventures program known as Jian Kang Kuai Che, which translates as “Health Express.” The program employs different educational tracks — one for kids, reached through schools; one for adults, who gather in places such as town halls; and one for infectious disease physicians through local hospitals. Since Jian Kang Kuai Che was launched in 2010, over 400,000 students, 10,000 adults and 300 physicians have been trained.

Novartis’ commitment to creating long-lasting solutions for global health isn’t ending here. The company is adapting these Social Ventures models and scaling up operations to transform healthcare systems around the world.

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