

Effective action against malaria and gastrointestinal illness could save the lives of millions of children a year. Measures against HIV/Aids could prevent 16 million deaths and 43 million new infections in the next two decades. Cheap treatments could stem the sharp rise in tuberculosis that kills over half a million Africans annually.

Killer diseases are sapping Africa's vitality and threatening its future. The AllAfrica Foundation, with support from allAfrica.com, is launching HealthAfrica.org – a flexible, multi-layered Internet hub to stimulate media coverage and to provide information, communications and technology services to address Africa's health emergency with cost-effective action.

Although innovative uses of appropriate technologies are making contributions in scattered settings, there is no flexible, scaleable, user-friendly toolset to facilitate information and service delivery.

Whether the requirement is mapping funding of health initiatives within countries, coordinating donations to such projects as “malaria-free zones,” connecting rural health workers with mentors via mobile devices, collecting epidemiological data, monitoring and evaluating services or scaling up training programs for dispensing anti-retrovirals for HIV treatment, an integrated platform that enables and ties together the varied functions of a

The power of the web is only marginally exploited for achieving health objectives.

comprehensive health-improvement network is needed desperately. Equally urgent are digital commons within countries or sectors to share ideas and concerns.

Yet, technology-enabled projects are commonly too complex to use – wasting the funds invested – while simultaneously being rigid and limiting.

HealthAfrica unites information access and technology functions into a one-stop resource for producing, aggregating and accessing news and information; disseminating data; sharing and discussing ideas and strategies; facilitating interventions and services; and linking

communities with resources. It aims to support, rather than supplant, all similar efforts – as in a recent collaboration to provide nationwide, real-time communication for anti-HIV work in DRC.

The initiative taps AllAfrica's expertise in news compilation and dissemination, in organizing, tagging and indexing data, in integrated technology applications and in reaching a broad, global public concerned about Africa. HealthAfrica is:

Information: news, documents, roundtables and communication pathways for global health professionals, businesses, policymakers, scholars, media and the public

Services: data, alerts, technology tools, tutorials, long-distance consultations and mobile services

Interactive linkages and resource-transfers: connecting communities in Africa with formal and informal networks of financial and material support, matching health professionals with opportunities for volunteer work, and real-time tracking of funding and projects for health-care workers, governments, funders and NGOs

Without more effective interventions against its major health challenges, Africa will meet none of the Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction. HealthAfrica provides a powerful tool for organizing a coordinated response.

At the request of the president of Liberia, HealthAfrica is headquartered in Monrovia and is developing a prototype of the initiative as HealthLiberia.org. Four elements, customized to help Liberia rebuild public health services after decades of conflict, will demonstrate the potential of technology-based interventions, even in the most challenging contexts.

See: HealthLiberia.org

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