

Local Biotech Sector and Global Health Development

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Health development is a global issue and must be taken seriously by developed countries. On the other hand, a sustainable health development in developing and undeveloped countries cannot be achieved without active participation of the local biotech sector. Considering the immigration policy and multiculturalism, Canada can play an important role in contributing to the growth of the biotech sector in developing countries.

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS health has been raised as a global issue. The pandemic patterns of diseases such as AIDS, SARS, Avian flu, BSE and many others indicate how vulnerable the world could be in response to health risks regardless of their origin. In recent years global health has become the centrepiece for many research institutes, NGOs and governments. The number of conferences, published articles, and even journals dedicated to this issue has dramatically increased (*Global Health Council, 2008*).

In a global era in which flow of information, economy and health are so tightly connected in a highly transverse network, health care in developing and underdeveloped countries is a global issue in and of itself. However, questions of how to help, contribute and make progress in global health development are at large an ongoing debate. But one thing is clear: the world, and especially developed countries, must take this matter seriously. It is also important to note that sustainable health

development in developing countries will not be achieved without the major contribution of local and native businesses. With this perspective, the McLaughlin-Rotman Centre for Global Health in Toronto hosted a conference titled *Mobilizing the Private Sector for Global Health Development* in May 2007. Many international companies, mainly from China, Brazil, and South Africa, participated, as well as academics, a few Canadian biotechnology firms, and consulting agencies (*University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics, 2008*).

One of the focus issues of the conference were the Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) countries. According to Dr. C.K. Prahalad, Distinguished University Professor of Corporate Strategy at the University of Michigan, there is a huge potential for growing businesses in the BOP countries. He estimated this potential at approximately five trillion dollars, from which 154 billion is in health care (*Prahalad, 2004*). Already, Indian and Chinese companies have come a long way. By 2010, the Indian

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biotech sector will have 10% of the global market at around 5 billion dollars. According to Dr. Sara Frew, research associate of the McLaughlin-Rotman Centre, success stories are many. An example includes Shnatha Biotechniques, in India, which produces the H.B. vaccine and supplies 40% of Unicef global requirements (*Frew et al., 2007*).

Local biotechnology businesses are vital in the sustainability of health care in underdeveloped countries. Developed countries cannot entirely solve the problem of lack of health care in developing countries just by providing funding. Already developed countries spend millions of dollars in foreign aid — which can save lives but creates a cycle of dependency — and cannot provide sustainable health care solutions for locals. On the other hand, the governments in many developing countries are not strong enough to carry the bureaucratic weight and huge cost of providing

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Medicare and pharmacare for their citizens. Meanwhile, small local businesses are interested in providing health products for local needs. The help from developed countries needs to change its nature from donations to supporting these local and native businesses. Developed countries can make a big difference in upgrading the biotech sector in underdeveloped coun-

tries, by not only providing funds, but also scientific resources to this sector. Even in the BOP countries the development of the biotech sector will not progress without a serious contribution from private biotech businesses in those countries.

In this whole process Canada can play a huge role, perhaps more so than any other country. This is certainly not limited to humanitarian efforts, in which Canada has always been an international leader. Canadian multiculturalism and immigration policy has been rather unique in the world, and in the last decade Toronto has become more global than any other city in North America. Dr. Daar and his colleagues have already shown (*Seguin et al., 2006*) what a crucial role scientific diaspora can play in stimulating trade and collaboration between Canada and the country of origin. With more than one million Chinese Canadians and one million Indian Canadians, Canada has access to a tremendous network of human resources. By organizing an annual conference on Global Health, Toronto is one step ahead in becoming the Mecca of the biotech sector for developing countries.■

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