

Merck supports schistosomiasis education in Mozambique

Around 80% of Mozambicans suffer from the parasitic worm disease, more commonly known as bilharzia...

Merck (<http://www.merckgroup.com>), a leading company for innovative, top-quality high-tech products in healthcare, life science and performance materials, is fighting schistosomiasis in Mozambique.



Schistosomiasis. (Image: Public Domain)

On Saturday in Namaacha, Mozambique, together with German Bundesrat President Volker Bouffier, Merck Executive Board member Kai Beckmann presented 20,000 brochures aimed at educating children on the causes of the tropical worm disease to Mozambique's Deputy Health Minister Mouzinho Saíde. The contribution is part of the Merck Praziquantel Donation programme: Merck is partnering with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to fight schistosomiasis in Africa. The partnership is a central initiative of Merck, within the scope of its responsible corporate governance, to improve access to health for underserved populations in low- and middle-income countries.

Taking a holistic approach

"We want to eliminate schistosomiasis in Africa. Thus we are not just donating tablets, but also taking a holistic approach," said Beckmann. Since 2007, Merck has supplied WHO with more than 200 million praziquantel tablets free of charge. So far, this has enabled the treatment of around 54 million patients. "Millions of children suffer from this insidious disease - here in Mozambique as well. The disease prevents them from learning and weakens the country's development potential. With our education program, we want to ensure that less children contract the disease. We want to give children new opportunities, while at the same time promoting economic growth and making a brighter future possible," continued Beckmann. After Malawi and Senegal, Mozambique is the third African country to benefit from the education programme. So far, Merck has provided schools with a total of one million brochures and 75,000 posters. The material is available in English, French and Portuguese.

Aiming to improve healthcare throughout Africa

The donation was presented in Namaacha in the south of Mozambique during German Bundesrat President Bouffier's trip to South Africa and Mozambique from March 13 to March 23. Beckmann is part of a delegation of representatives from the worlds of science and business that is accompanying Bouffier. Bouffier welcomed Merck's commitment: "Merck is engaged in various initiatives in Africa in order to improve the quality of local health care. In doing so, the company, headquartered in Hesse, is not just taking responsibility in its home market, but also everywhere it operates."

Deputy Health Minister Saíde thanked Merck for the donation, "In terms of disease burden and economic impact, schistosomiasis is considered one of the most devastating neglected tropical diseases. Merck's commitment not only helps infected children, but also supports our public health care system."

Schistosomiasis is widespread in Mozambique: According to WHO estimates, more than 18 million people - around 80% of the total population - require treatment. In 2009 and



Mozambican children... the elimination of schistosomiasis would improve their health substantially. (Image: Merck)

2010, Merck supplied WHO with more than 8.7 million praziquantel tablets for Mozambique. Since 2011, in agreement with WHO, the country in southern Africa has been receiving tablets from the British Department for International Development (DFID). The distribution of the tablets is jointly coordinated by the British Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI) and the Mozambican Ministry of Health. As members of the Global Schistosomiasis Alliance, Merck and SCI are currently developing a joint concept to fight schistosomiasis in Mozambique in the future.

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