

BRIEFING PAPER

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Partnerships for change: Africa should collaborate across borders and sectors to spur progress and wellbeing



The challenges facing Africa and the world are immense and complex. Only by working in partnership – across borders, organisations and sectors – will people and planet survive and thrive. If African governments, institutions, researchers and local people work together to support One Health initiatives, the continent will achieve enormous



progress and show other countries the way forward in promoting health, wellbeing and prosperity.

Introduction:

Africa in the twenty-first century faces enormous change and challenges.

The continent has the fastest growing population in the world.¹ Climate change is shifting weather patterns and water access on a continent where two thirds of people make a living from farming, and agriculture accounts for 32 per cent of gross domestic product.² Deforestation, environmental degradation and pollution are threatening ecosystems, soil fertility, livelihoods and farming.

Urban sprawl is disrupting the delicate balance between cities and countryside and eating into the migration routes of herders and wildlife – creating conditions for disease to spread more easily. Devastating illnesses continue to threaten human and animal life, exacerbate poverty and decimate livelihoods.

Many countries across Africa lack the resources to detect, identify and control disease. Facilities that do exist are concentrated in cities and towns, far from the often rural source of many disease outbreaks. This means diseases often go undetected or misdiagnosed, potentially causing much greater devastation to people, animals and livelihoods.

Why are partnerships vital for

¹ [World Population Prospects](#) (United Nations, 2015)

² [Human capital for agriculture](#) (World Bank, 2014)

health, wellbeing and economic success in Africa?

At the Southern African Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillance (SACIDS), we believe action must be taken fast to equip Africa with the skills to tackle these challenges head on.

Since 2008, we have been working to ramp up Africa's capacity for detecting, preventing and treating disease, not just by improving resources and knowledge of researchers, but by working with local people – farmers, herders and all those whose livelihoods are closely linked to animals, wildlife and environment.

At the heart of this is 'One Health'.

Unlike many scientific and health programmes, One Health promotes research and action that looks at the health of humans, animal and environment collectively, and comes up with solutions to benefit all three.

We believe that if Africa is to thrive, it must tackle the health and wellbeing of human, animal and environmental life together.

Partnerships are central to One Health – partnerships between organisations, across borders and sectors, and between policymakers, researchers and local communities.

This is not only better for health, it also saves money by slashing the impact of disease outbreaks and by pooling resources and



equipment on a continent where these are often scarce.

It is the most effective, pragmatic and economic route forward for Africa.

How can countries forge better partnerships for health and economic success?

If Africa is to improve health and wellbeing for people, animals and environment, governments must do more to support the different kinds of partnership at the heart of One Health.

One Health requires researchers, health workers and local people to work together across sectors and across borders.

This can be complex, but it reaps huge rewards: investments of time and money up front save governments and organisations millions of dollars before long.

SACIDS has spent the best part of a decade building partnerships to improve life and wellbeing in Africa. Collaboration is the lifeblood of the organisation, whether this involves building links between researchers in East and Southern Africa and globally, or forging projects that bring together animal, human and environmental scientists with social scientists.

“We were quite conscious right from the start that if we go it alone, it won’t work. Right from the beginning the thinking was shared across human, animal and environmental health as a

shared enterprise.”

**– Professor Mark Rweyemamu,
Director, Southern African Centre
for Infectious Disease Surveillance
SACIDS**

There are three main types of SACIDS partnership:

- Partnerships bringing together researchers and institutions in East and Southern Africa, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania
- Partnerships and platforms that enable researchers, ministries and local people to share ideas and collaborate
- ‘Smart partnerships’ with researchers and organisations in industrialised countries: SACIDS links researchers in Africa with centres of excellence in industrialised countries

“If we really want to tackle infectious diseases in a sustainable way, we have to approach in a united front – across species and across ecosystems, nations and borders.”

**Mark Rweyemamu, Director,
SACIDS**



Stories of success

Back in 2008, when SACIDS was just starting out, there was very little communication between animal, human and environmental organisations in East and Southern Africa.

Today, that has all changed. The medical and veterinary community in the region are now talking and planning projects with each other,

as our universities and ministries. SACIDS has been absolutely central to this.

But far more needs to be done.

SACIDS calls upon governments in Sub-Saharan Africa to take the sensible, pragmatic, economically savvy step of supporting more One Health projects across the continent.

“Expertise is moving more and more out of the siloed mentality. When we started in 2008, that was almost unthinkable.”

– Professor Mark Rweyemamu, Director, SACIDS

5 ways policymakers can help build partnerships for health:

- **Invest time and money** in platforms that enable policymakers, researchers and communities to share ideas and drive projects forward
- **Develop systems** for creating policy across sectors, taking into account different challenges and needs, and across borders
- **Support the collection** of transdisciplinary, cross-sector evidence
- **Invest in technologies** to make this happen: there’s still a myth that technology is expensive. This is no longer the case. Invest a little now, save millions in the future
- **Take it seriously:** SACIDS can help policymakers gain a richer understanding of One Health and why it makes economic sense

If African governments take these steps, they will make huge inroads into protecting health, wellbeing and livelihoods

Notes to editors:

- [SACIDS](#) (the Southern African Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillance) is a virtual centre with a physical base at the Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania. It was established in 2008.
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