

## Rockefeller launches initiative to boost health systems in Africa, Asia

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, July 01, 2009

[Xinhua](#) 1 July 2009

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

The Rockefeller Foundation on Wednesday unveiled a 100-million-U.S. dollar initiative to support the strengthening of health systems in Africa and Asia.

Addressing a news conference in Nairobi, the Foundation's President Judith Rodin said the Transforming Health Systems (THS) will address global need for affordable, accessible and quality health services.

Rodin said the launch of the THS will shift focus from treatments and vaccines to informing the efforts of low-income countries to take on the challenges of health systems. The goal, she said, is to expand health coverage and provide new health and financial protections for all.

"The Rockefeller Foundation has long been committed to public health interventions in the developing world to break bottlenecks that prevent access to quality health services," said Rodin.

"Although it is imperative that we continue developing and delivering new vaccines and medicines, many people still cannot access a clinic, pay out-of-pocket costs for medication and treatment, and fall into poverty as a result. As countries begin to make significant investments in public health, the Foundation's Transforming Health Systems initiative will help ensure that investment is felt universally by supporting national efforts to provide equitable access."

The five-year THS initiative will launch with investments in three countries, Ghana, Rwanda, and Vietnam, and also support select activities at the regional and global level.

Learning from these countries will then be applied to others in the region with subsequent investments and be key to the initiative's success.

Rodin reaffirmed the Foundation's legacy in and commitment to the field of global health, a history which includes founding schools of public health, developing a Nobel Prize-winning vaccine for yellow fever, pioneering Africa's earliest AIDS treatment programs, and mobilizing public-private partnerships that accelerate the search for AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria drugs.

She said while health spending has increased dramatically around the world, access to affordable, quality services has not, particularly in developing countries.

“In many places, financial support and technical interventions cannot reach the people who most need them,” said Rodin.

The Foundation’s work will help low income countries remove barriers to effective, efficient health systems, thus opening new avenues to bring revolutionary treatments and cures to the places and communities where they will make the greatest difference.

“The Foundation and its partners will work on both promoting a global agenda on health systems strengthening and the progressive adoption of universal health coverage,” said Ariel Pablos-Mendez, Managing Director responsible for THS.

“A country’s shift to universal coverage does not happen overnight. As some low-income countries have already demonstrated, it is built on the reorganization of domestic financing rather than the influx of increased amounts of foreign aid. If invested more wisely, increases in health spending can contribute to sound economic policy, better health outcomes, and lower rates of poverty.”

In developing countries with inefficient health systems, the majority of health spending is paid out-of-pocket, making care unaffordable for most people.

A recent report from the World Health Organization estimated that as a result of inadequate health systems, 125 million people spend nearly half their annual income in health care, and catastrophic health expenditures send 25 million families back into poverty every year.

In well-built, accessible health delivery systems, disease and death rates should decrease as spending and the number of people cared for increases.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, under-five mortality rates have decreased by only 15 percent since 1990, despite increased health spending.

This is a relatively low success rate compared to a decrease of more than 50 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean during the same period. Additional research shows that Sub-Saharan Africa shoulders 24 percent of the global disease burden, but benefits from only three percent of the world’s health workers.

Rodin said the Foundation and its partners will foster more accessible, efficient health systems with improved financial protections to make universal health coverage an accepted, feasible, and desirable goal adopted by countries throughout the world.

The Foundation hopes to provide governments and leaders with resources and information to manage their country’s health systems, and to ensure that integrated ehealth systems are developed and leveraged to improve the quality, access, and affordability of health services among low-income populations.

“Despite the global economic situation, investment in health systems that provide accessible, affordable and quality care to the developing world cannot wait. The Rockefeller Foundation, with its deep global health history, is positioned to take on the challenge of strengthening health systems,” said James Nyoro, Managing Director Rockefeller Foundation Africa.

“With the incredible influx of funding that has gone into vertical interventions in the

region, the Foundation feels that now is the necessary time to build on our successes in capacity building and technological interventions to help countries develop systems that will enable new innovative drugs and treatments to reach the people truly in need.”

The Foundation’s newest initiative will coordinate with key grantees and partner institutions, including government and non-government organizations, policy and research centers, professional associations, private sector entities, and international development agencies and donors.

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