

Personal Reflection on Africa's Counterfeit Pharmaceutical Epidemic

Since few decades, the population of Africa, our beloved continent, is booming. This is not bad news. Let us embrace this positively and celebrate our demographic growth and work to establish a sustainable economic growth. This is an important opportunity for the future of Africa which has tremendous potentials. However, key responsibilities arise from increased population growth. For instance, healthcare services and the availability of high-quality pharmaceutical products should be provided to respond to patient's medicines demands. In sub-Saharan Africa, unfortunately, key health sectors remain poorly run and facing important challenges.

As human being and being human, what do we do if we do not have what we need? Well, we tend to find alternative solutions. This is exactly what is happening with (1) the shortage of pharmaceutical drugs and (2) the supra-expensive imported drugs in Africa. Unfortunately, many of us in Africa rely on counterfeit medications to cure some acute or chronic pathologies. This is a widely spread way as an alternative approach to get medicine in Africa. I personally grew up within this system. With the nearest pharmacist miles away, it was not uncommon to run across the street to buy medications for our indisposed relatives at home. I did not of course run laboratory tests to determine whether the hundreds of medications I bought for myself or for my relatives were authentic, unexpired, not overdosed, or effective. However, I do know, at least I can attest and confirm, that the storage conditions are far to be optimal. In addition, the pharmaceutical medication sellers were not pharmacists. One legitime question is to ask whether the millions of medications currently available on our street markets are

effective.

Some could ask whether these medications bought to cure some of my relatives' acute diseases actually worked. Well, I do not know. Sometimes, we got better from our illness when taking these medications. Sometimes it was right away. Sometimes it took few days or weeks to get better. Overall, we grew up healthy without any major health issues. Maybe we were a little bit lucky to escape the dark side of counterfeit medications. Maybe these medications exerted placebo effect on us. Maybe these counterfeit medications were overdosed in active component and we were lucky to survived as other might passed away because of overdosed medications.

I can go through a lot of *maybe* and hypotheses. But *maybe* we should start to make sure that what we sell to treat our population is well designed and intended to be used as well as verifying the concentration of the drug our population take. As society, how do we organize to eradicate this epidemic of counterfeit medications? Here are few of my thoughts. *First* of all, let us organize our society to make sure that affordable drugs are available in established neighboring pharmacies. Let work together to make sure that the majority of our people could have the privilege to offer to themselves high quality drugs when they are sick. Finally, a well coordination between our leaders in collaboration with the vigilance population to denounce the presence of counterfeit network of fake medications will certainly be as critical for the fight against counterfeit medicines which will be a long-term fight.

At the end of the day, health is life! Let us not play with our health. Let us take care of our health. We have only one life!