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How Beverages, Beer And Ice Cream Can Improve Access To Life-Saving Medicines In Africa

If you can get a Coca-Cola - and many other products - nearly anywhere in Africa, why are medicines not regularly available to patients?

This was the question posed by Trip Allport, managing director of the Africa Resource Centre (ARC) South Africa, in a thought-provoking presentation at the recent SAPICS Conference in Cape Town.

"It is a huge injustice if a woman can stop to get a Coca-Cola on the way to the clinic for her child, but medicines are not accessible," he stated. Allport noted that the same is often true for chocolate, beer, SIM cards and personal health products, among many other goods and services reaching the very last mile across Africa. His presentation to supply chain professionals at the 40th annual SAPICS Conference highlighted success stories in which the private sector is sharing and transferring its capabilities and know-how to Ministries of Health and government organisations in order to improve healthcare supply chains in Africa and enhance patients' access to life saving medicines.

"There are examples from around the continent of how collaboration across sectors is advancing the transformation of national supply systems and contributing to better health for Africa," Allport said. One of these is Project Last Mile, a partnership between the US Agency for International Development (USAID), The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Global Fund and the Coca-Cola Company. He explained that ARC's role is building and scaling partnerships inspired by Project Last Mile, across all sectors, to build the capacity of Ministries of Health in Africa to strengthen supply chains and improve the availability of medicines and health commodities. Allport has helped

develop Project Last Mile since 2010 and is now the managing director of the Africa Resource Centre.

“We asked ourselves how Coca-Cola is successfully getting cold beverages into the hands of consumers across Africa. What lessons can be learned and applied in healthcare in terms of improving the uptime of refrigerators and maintaining the cold chain by tapping into local service providers of the Nigerian Bottling Company which help them achieve a 99.3%+ uptime? Can we help patients with chronic diseases access their medicines in more convenient locations - to both decongest facilities and improve adherence - by tapping into micro distribution models, entrepreneurialism and multi-channel retail models? Lessons and know-how like this will make a substantial difference to making medicines and health products available across the continent.”

“We must bring a business mentality into healthcare supply chains. Innovation is not always hi-tech, and sometimes simple solutions yield big benefits,” he stressed. “This is about being creative and looking to the private sector for learnings, experience, networks and relationships which could bring new approaches to public health systems in Africa.”

South Africa’s Chronic Centralised Medicines Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD) Initiative is an example of an effective distribution solution developed through a partnership between the National Department of Health and the private sector. *“Instead of travelling long distances to wait in long queues at crowded public-sector facilities, this programme is enabling stable chronic patients to collect their medication quickly and easily at pick-up points identified by patient demand. These pick-up points include private-sector pharmacies and retailers. The result is that stable chronic patients do not need to visit local government clinics and hospitals as often. Their lives are made easier and the burden on state facilities is relieved and they have more time and resources available for sick patients.*

“African governments and their partners could dramatically improve their ability to meet their health goals with greater access to independent and local experts, and experience from private sector and academic partners,” Allport stressed.

He explained that ARC is an independent advisor to Ministries of Health, working to help countries achieve their health goals by benefiting from access to experts from private sector, academia and professional associations such as SAPICS. ARC works to broker and build strategic partnerships that aim to improve the availability of medicines and health products by strengthening supply chains systems in Africa.

He urged SAPICS delegates and their organisations to join the network. *“Imagine the impact, if we all collaborated and shared skills and ideas, distribution expertise, marketing know-how and business skills, in order to get-life saving medicines and medical supplies the ‘last mile’ to those who need it most.”*

Hosted by SAPICS, The Professional Body for Supply Chain Management, the annual SAPICS Conference is Africa’s leading event for supply chain professionals. This year’s 40th annual conference in Cape Town was a milestone event that saw more than 800 delegates converge to share knowledge and network.

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ABOUT SAPICS: <http://www.sapics.org>

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SAPICS builds operations management excellence in individuals and enterprises through superior education and training, internationally recognised certifications, comprehensive resources and a country-wide network of accomplished industry professionals. This network is ever expanding and now includes associates in other African countries. SAPICS is proud to represent APICS (the

global end-to-end supply chain association) as its exclusive premier channel partner in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Established 40 years ago, the annual SAPICS Conference is the leading event in Africa for supply chain professionals.