

North - South research partnerships

Issue context

A newly agreed, long-term partnership between Novartis (a Swiss pharmaceutical company) and the Singapore Economic Development Board (SEDB) has been announced. This represents a new business model, and a commitment to social responsibility. Stakeholder Forum is hosting a workshop in Johannesburg on August 24-26, just ahead of the World Summit for Sustainable Development, to discuss a range of issues around the subject, with a view to sharing perspectives and developing further partnerships.

The Draft Chairman's text for the WSSD in Johannesburg stresses the need to "promote equitable and improved access to ... essential and safe drugs at affordable prices". This proposal offers the opportunity to use the WSSD as a focal point for establishing a way forward in this critical area. Stakeholder Forum has spoken to a number of stakeholders involved, including WHO, NGOs, donors/foundations, pharmaceutical companies, governments and scientists.

Process context

Stakeholder Forum for Our Common Future is an international, multi-stakeholder organisation – a network and forum committed to the promotion of global sustainable development (see www.stakeholderforum.org). For the last two years, Stakeholder Forum has been working towards the Earth Summit 2002 in Johannesburg. The main event around the summit that it is organising is the Implementation Conference.

The Implementation Conference (see www.earthsummit2002.org/ic) is a key element in a broader process: *Stakeholder Action for Our Common Future*. Within specific areas of Health, Energy, Food Security and Freshwater, stakeholders will agree to engage in collaborative action that will contribute towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Agreements.

Proposal

Relevant stakeholder organisations affected by and concerned with development of North - South research partnerships, including, in particular, governments, donors and the pharmaceutical industry, are invited to participate in a dedicated work programme. This will initially involve participation in a three day, professionally facilitated workshop in Johannesburg (August 24-26) and the preparation for that workshop. Ongoing work will be as determined by the stakeholders attending this workshop.

- gain an understanding of the recent agreement between Novartis and the SEDB;
- share a common understanding of the potential for partnerships to address priority issues;
- explore complementary initiatives, identify potential funding sources and explore how these are of interest, in particular, to economies in transition;
- identify stakeholders and partners required to tackle these issues effectively; and
- commit to participation in the Implementation Conference, with a will to engage fully in the discussion and actively seek new partnerships for action.

NITD - Novartis Institute for Tropical Diseases

- Novartis, a Swiss pharmaceutical company, and the Singapore Economic Development Board (SEDB) are funding a research institute for infectious diseases in Singapore. The contract has been signed, currently the search for an institute director is ongoing.
- Purpose is to discover novel compounds for the treatment of infectious diseases, with a focus on advancing biomedical research in diseases affecting people in developing countries.
- Initial disease focus is on treatment-resistant tuberculosis and Dengue-fever. Both diseases have high health impact in developing countries, are growing in importance and lack adequate treatment options. At the same time there is a resurgence of tuberculosis in developed countries, so that there is a chance for the institute to refinance its activities.
- Location: Singapore, chosen based on its infrastructure, existing biomedical research capacity and closeness to areas in which the target diseases are endemic.
- Financing: Shared investment by Novartis and the SEDB, the contract covers a ten year perspective, with a total funding of S\$ 220 million (approx. US\$ 125 million).
- Staffing: 50 full time employees plus a further 20 working in partner institutions to enhance effective collaboration.
- Technology: Novartis will provide access to state-of-the-art discovery technology including genomics.
- Novartis interest: Fulfil commitment to help find new treatments for diseases that are becoming an increasing public health challenge, particularly in developing countries. Broaden research base in infectious diseases area. Fulfil role as a Good Corporate Citizen (Novartis committed to the UN Global Compact in 2000). Commercial interest to re-finance the institute's activities and make it economically sustainable - Novartis retains marketing rights for compounds that have a significant commercial potential in developed markets.
- SEDB interest: Strengthen technology platform in Singapore, develop manpower capabilities, commercial opportunities through rights to commercialize technologies and products arising from NITD - such partnerships will have positive spin-off effects, potentially leading and contributing to the proliferation of local biomedical start-ups.
- Access to drugs: Aim is to make novel drugs available to poor people in developing countries at the lowest possible price. This includes the possibility of differential pricing strategies (re-finance the research through higher prices in developed country markets) as well as additional partnerships for development, manufacturing (considering Singapore as a manufacturing location) and distribution of drugs. Novartis will patent novel compounds, but patents shall not interfere with the goal to make drugs affordable for the poor.

APPENDIX C: RSVP FORM *

Action Plan Title: North – South research partnerships

Participant's name	
Organisation represented	
Arrival date in Joburg	
Departure date from Joburg	
Attending WSSD (Y/N)?	
Hotel name during IC	
Nights booked (start – finish)	
Hotel name during WSSD	
Nights booked (start – finish)	
Flights /transport to Joburg reserved (Y/N)?	

** Please complete and either fax back to +44 20 7089 4310 or email to gbaker@earthsummit2002.org at your earliest convenience, and in any case no later than 18 July.*