

A logistics approach to malaria in Africa

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The problems of archaic logistics infrastructure, inefficient distribution channels and disruptive black markets must all be addressed urgently if Africa is to cope with the growing problem of malaria, according to a study published in the *International Journal of Logistics Systems and Management*.

Historically, malaria is humanity's biggest killer and although it has been eradicated in some regions it remains the biggest infectious threat in many parts of the world. Malaria kills 1.1 million people every year and afflicts 300 million with acute illness. The vast majority of those infected are children under the age of five years. Getting anti-malarial drugs to those at risk across Africa is an enormous problem of economics, politics and infrastructure. Now, Hokey Min of the College of Business Administration, at Bowling Green State University, in Ohio, has identified the various factors that must be considered if this situation is to be remedied.

Min has developed a comprehensive supply chain map that reveals the labyrinths of African logistics infrastructure, distribution channels, government regulations and business customs. This map could help improve access to anti-malarial drugs as well as avoiding disruption to the drug supply chain. He points out that there are countless challenges posed by trade and regulatory barriers across Africa. Communication difficulties, seasonal variations in logistics infrastructure and a high rate of theft and damage during storage and transit also potentially overwhelm any company hoping to distribute anti-malarial drugs in the African market. He suggests that outsourcing of logistics functions to

control such risks and costs might be the only solution.

Moreover, African legal and ethical codes have many "subtleties" he says, so it is potentially beneficial to find local partners that can assist with such subtleties. In addition, the chronically poor roads suggest that local transport options, such as donkey carts and bicycles should also be considered as viable modes of distribution rather than a company expecting to transport antimalarials to rural areas in trucks.

Recognizing the idiosyncrasies of drug distribution in Africa is essential to coping with the lethal problem of malaria. "[Supply chain](#) efficiency for distribution of anti-malarial drugs is a matter of life and death to many malaria-endemic countries in Africa," says Min. And, although few attempts have been made to tackle the problem, an understanding of the African distribution system and the unique but complicated socioeconomic and regulatory environments affecting African logistics operations is essential. Min's preliminary study on addressing the issues points the way forward to improving a disheartening situation.

More information: "Mapping the supply chain of anti-malarial drugs in Sub-Saharan African countries" in *Int. J. Logistics Systems and Management*, 2012, 11, 1-23

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