

Record number of Africans get AIDS drugs: UNAIDS chief

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A record number of Africans now have access to drugs to control the HIV virus, but the continent must work harder to strengthen the lifeline, the head of UNAIDS says.

At the end of last year, 6.2 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were taking antiretroviral treatment, an increase of 1.1 million over 2010, UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibe said in an interview on Thursday.

It means that 56 percent of Africans in need of the drugs now have access to them, he said.

"Ten years ago, nobody would have imagined that such a result would be possible," he said.

The cost of the drugs has plummeted from around \$15,000 per head a dozen years ago to some \$80 today, and many treatments are far simpler for patients than in the past.

Sidibe -- visiting Paris ahead of the July 22-27 International [AIDS](#) Conference in Washington -- said he was worried that [African countries](#) remained so dependent on foreign help.

"With the exception of South Africa, 80 percent of Africans with HIV have access to drugs via funding from outside Africa. This is not sustainable. It's even dangerous," he said.

Budget constraints in donor countries since the 2008 [financial crisis](#) have caused funding to stagnate, falling by 13 percent between 2009 and 2010 alone.

China now totally funds its domestic AIDS programme and the figure for fellow emerging giant India is 95 percent, but in Africa some countries are 100-percent dependent on foreign help, Sidibe said.

Another problem is that Africa is 80-percent dependent on India for its drugs, Sidibe said.

He added he would call for an African Medicines Regulatory Agency at an Africa Union summit, taking place in Addis Ababa from July 13 to 15.

The proposed agency would vet drugs, given the widening problem of fake or below-quality medications that are being sold in Africa, and encourage local production of AIDS pills.

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