

Save the Children teams up with pharma giant GSK in Africa

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International development charity Save the Children is linking up with British pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline in what both sides say is a unique collaboration to save children's lives in Africa.

[GSK](#) will provide £15 million (18 million euros, \$23 million) over five years to train [healthcare workers](#) and fund Save the Children community projects in the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) and Kenya.

The charity will take a seat on a new GSK board overseeing its paediatric research and development "to accelerate progress on innovative life-saving interventions for under-fives" and widen access in the developing world, they said in a joint statement.

Save the Children admitted the tie-up would be controversial given criticism—that it once voiced—that the pharmaceutical giant limits access to healthcare in developing countries by setting the prices of its drugs too high.

"In the past Save the Children may not have embarked on a collaboration with a pharmaceutical company like GSK," admitted Justin Forsyth, chief executive of the charity's British branch.

"But we believe we can make a huge difference if we harness the power of GSK's innovation, research and global reach."

Under the partnership, GSK will look into reformulating the antiseptic

[chlorhexidine](#), currently found in mouthwash, into a product that could be used to cleanse the umbilical cord stump on newborn babies.

Studies from South Asia suggest this could prevent up to one sixth of [newborn deaths](#) in high-risk areas, it said.

The pharmaceutical company will also step up the distribution of an antibiotic in powder form that could treat childhood pneumonia, which currently kills 1.4 million under-fives globally.

Save the Children's on-the-ground expertise will be vital in deciding how such products can be distributed, from the language on the packaging to the weather and conditions in the target areas, the company said.

GSK, which posted pre-tax profits of £1.41 billion for the first quarter of this year, will fund the development of the products and said it would sell them at cost price.

The deal raises questions of whether Save the Children will be obliged to promote GSK products, but Simon Wright, the charity's head of child survival in London, insisted the deal was a "fantastic opportunity" to influence where the pharma giant spends its money.

"Some of those (products) may work, some of those may not work, but we're also engaging more broadly in their research and development agenda and making sure the impact on the poorest is a key part of it," Wright told AFP.

He said GSK had "changed a lot over the last few years" in promoting access to medicines, and said charities must recognise that the private sector "has to be part of the solution".

"The idea of just staying distant from the private sector, saying, 'it's

involved in grubbily making profits, we don't want to go anywhere near it'—I think those days have gone," he said.

The £15 million includes £1 million to be raised by GSK employees, and will see £9 million given to projects in DR Congo and £4 million for projects in Kenya.

Rohit Malpani, director of policy for Medecins Sans Frontieres, said: "The real understanding of how effective this partnership is, is whether or not companies like GSK put access to medicines at the heart of their business models."

Malpani said that although drugs companies had improved their pricing practices over the past decade, it was a small step from a very low base.

"People are still paying too high prices, innovation has not truly changed to benefit low-income countries," he told AFP.

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