

Did We Get It Right? A Look Back at Past mHealth Efforts in West Africa

Last year, I had the honour of speaking at the [Wilton Park](#) forum, [\(Re\)Building health systems in West Africa: what role for ICT and mobile technologies?](#), sponsored in part by [Qualcomm® Wireless Reach™](#). This forum, hosted by [mPowering Frontline Health Workers](#), focused on the response to the Ebola Virus in West Africa and the potential of ICT and mobile solutions in rebuilding strong health systems in the region.

As we prepare to convene the global community again at Wilton Park this week, we look to continue advancing last year's progress by sharing tangible models and strategies that are proven to support global community health workers. Can we put lessons learned from the recent Ebola outbreak into practice? At our Wilton Park meeting in June of last year we heard eloquent presentations on the role of ICT in tackling the Ebola crisis in West Africa. We reflected on the critical role of frontline health workers and how a more coordinated approach – on the part of the international community and donors – led by government and Ministries of Health and ICT, is necessary to address a global health crisis.

In reflecting on these and other recommendations that emerged from the June meeting, I am excited to participate in this year's forum. The timing of the conference, the high level and diverse group of participants, and the planned program are all essential ingredients for a thorough evaluation of strategies to help community health workers do what they do best: help keep us safe and healthy in all stages of life, from routine check-ups to emergency disease outbreaks.

What's the role of global health innovation?

In 2010, I founded [InStrat Global Health Solutions](#) to focus on global health innovation by identifying and deploying technology-based healthcare solutions to underserved markets using SMS and 3G wireless technologies. InStrat has successfully introduced mobile health technologies to Nigeria with remarkable results. For example, in April 2015, our [CliniPAK 360](#) implementing team identified the cause of a "mysterious" disease outbreak in Ondo State, Nigeria as 'Acute Methanol Poisoning' within 36 hours of its outbreak. Some of the principles brought to bear were reflected in the discussions in the June 2015 conference. These included: the recognition that the private sector is an important part of a sustainable solution; that new catalytic collaborations are needed for effectiveness; and that the emphasis on collection of data must shift to use of data.



InStrat CEO Okey Okuzu (author) providing training to community health workers in Nigeria for using tablets in the CliniPAK360 program

Paradigm-shifting ideas

Over the many years I've spent leading private sector corporations, including Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corp., Pfizer Inc., and JP Morgan Chase, I have attended first-rate international conferences where paradigm-shifting ideas are initiated. My experience at last year's Wilton Park ranked high on my experiential list. I appreciated opportunities to learn first-hand from people that led the fight against Ebola on the front lines in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, and to hear about the gravity of the toll it took on these nations and their populations. The meeting was an opportunity to meet and learn from global development sector leaders whose work continues to inspire my own at InStrat.

This year's global health forum is again co-organized by [mPowering Frontline Health Workers](#), with whom InStrat is pleased to partner on a pilot to deliver a tablet-based maternal and child health training program to frontline health workers in Nigeria.

I am beyond excited to participate in this conference to understand how the learnings from last year's event has shaped not only our current efforts but our thinking about how we can better empower the community health workforce to attain their true potential. I am also looking forward to enriching my knowledge set and tool kit – then putting them into practice as soon as the conference is over. Finally, I am happy to reconnect with some of the amazing people I met last year. See you at Wilton Park!