

UNESCO-MERCK Africa Research Summit

Geneva Declaration on Life Sciences & Health Research and Development

20 October 2015

We, participants of the UNESCO-Merck Africa Research Summit 2015, held on the 19 and 20 October 2015 in Geneva and Montreux (Switzerland), aim to affirm our strong commitment in developing life sciences research and health in Africa and draw the attention of policymakers, international organizations, the scientific community and the private sector on this issue that we believe is essential for the sustainable development of Africa.

We express our gratitude to UNESCO and Merck for convening this milestone event and we thank the Swiss authorities for the generous hospitality.

Mindful of previous commitments made by African countries and the international community in favour of the development of health research, including texts or instruments such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (October 2015); the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa-2024 (June 2014); the WHO Strategy on Research for Health (May 2010); the Bamako Call to Action on Research for Health (November 2008); the Ouagadougou Declaration on Primary Health Care and Health Systems in Africa (April 2008); the Accra Declaration on health research for disease control and development (June 2006); the Abuja Declaration on health research (March 2006); and the Mexico Statement on health research (November 2004).

We recognize that Africa is a region (continent) of great opportunities where there is abundant evidence of competence in Science even with scarce resources. African policymakers are showing an increasing interest in research and innovation and have taken steps forward to strengthen life sciences and health capacities in the African continent.

Despite these improvements the region requires additional efforts from society as a whole. The Ebola outbreak has lately highlighted the weakness of the African health systems and the inability to provide adequate scientific solutions to problems at the local level. Meanwhile, HIV, malaria and other infectious diseases continue to kill millions of African people. This scenario could worsen from increasing drug resistance and the emergence of new epidemic.

Deeply concerned that this situation is heavily burdening Africans and strongly convinced that life sciences and health research and innovation is essential for a sustainable development, we believe that Africa has an urgent need of:

- Partnerships to extend the research reach and the resources available.
- Development of human capital through north-south collaboration to then spread the knowledge through south-south collaboration.
- Improvement of the size of the funds available for scientific research and fight donor dependence to ensure sustainability of the research activities. Collaboration among researchers to build on data/information sharing and avoid duplication of work.

- Improving the interaction between the scientific community and policy makers to achieve common goals.
- Long term research policies strategically developed to address local needs.
- Conducive legal and administrative framework instruments free from heavy bureaucracy for the agile development of research.

We are resolved to commit ourselves in addressing these needs and we call upon policy makers, international organizations, the scientific community and the private sector to strengthen their engagement for the development of life sciences research and health in Africa.

We urge African policymakers to effectively implement more efficient health policies, which should be continuous, sustainable, clearer and responsive to local needs. To this end, it is essential for policymakers to consider the recommendations of the scientific community during the decision making process, and to invest more consistent resources in life sciences research and innovation. Authorities should also provide legal instruments able to protect intellectual property and settle a transparent and dynamic administrative structure. Furthermore, we call upon national policymakers to establish well-funded centres of excellence and to promote the spreading of a general scientific culture among the populations, in order to create a more favourable environment for scientific research.

We call upon the International Organizations engaged in the development of human health in Africa to assist African governments in their decision making and to provide a financial, technical and scientific support to African countries, especially by promoting capacity building, international cooperation and knowledge transfer in the field of life sciences.

We call upon the scientific community to engage themselves in stronger and more productive cooperation with the authorities, to clearly inform them about health challenges. For this purpose, scientists must translate their technical vocabulary in a language understandable by policymakers. We exhort scientists to build stronger and more productive collaborations within the scientific community, within and among the different fields of the life sciences and health, within and among the African countries, as well as with the international scientific community. Networking is essential for research development. The new information and communications technologies offer revolutionary opportunities that have to be fully exploited by researchers.

We call upon the private sector to promote and share the discovery and development of products and technologies related to life sciences and health. We exhort pharmaceutical companies to facilitate access to medicine for all. We also invite the private sector to build durable bridges with the research community in order to bring basic research closer to local and practical needs. Furthermore, we invite the private sector to advocate for science research since it can reach parts of the civil society unfamiliar with scientists and policymakers.

We call upon policymakers, international organisations, the scientific community and the private sector to build multi-stakeholder partnerships able to foster scientific research, find innovative funding sources for research and provide more responsive and efficient answers to African life sciences research and health needs. In doing so, they will make a strong contribution to the sustainable development goals (SDGs).