

Philipus A. Paracelsus once stated, “Once a disease has entered the body, all parts which are healthy must fight it: not one alone, but all.” This statement portrays how our respective bodies respond to disease, but also provides insights into how our societies should respond to disease. One action humanity can not afford to take is to detach itself from humanitarian need. Just as our immune system works within our bodies to eliminate disease unilaterally, we as a society must develop methods that fight for those not healthy enough to fight. The weakest part of our global body currently lies in Africa. There are two aspects of research that are quintessential in determining solutions for the future: causes of disease, and case studies of diseases. Some of the main causes include: historical, geographical, and environmental factors. Each of these prove to be casually linked to the disease epidemic that plagues Africa. Through studying Smallpox, Sleeping Sickness, and AIDS — as well as their respective causes — society will be able to objectively work towards solutions.

First, it is important to analyze the causes of a problem in order to effectively determine solutions. Historically, colonialism and its impact — the abuse of weaker populations for personal gain — have deeply impoverished Africa and left it in a pit of political and economic instability. Debilitating poverty denies Africans basic necessities which has led to sweeping malnutrition, profound sanitation deficits, and unreliable water sources.<sup>1</sup> The historical causes of disease are important to examine and can provide profound insight into potential solutions. Furthermore, disease can be linked to the geography of Africa and its ability to develop in specific locations. These new

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<sup>1</sup>Bate, Roger. Fighting the Major Diseases of Africa: Sustaining the Gains of the Last Decade. AEI. <https://www.aei.org/publication/fighting-the-major-diseases-of-africa-sustaining-the-gains-of-the-last-decade/>.

pathogens didn't come in on a tail of a comet," said Dr. David Heymann, from the World Health Organization's Program on Communicable Diseases, "They're lurking in animals. But by disrupting nature, we have unleashed them onto ourselves."<sup>2</sup> Zoonotic diseases — those that originate in animals — make up the majority of emerging diseases. Since Africa has booming biodiversity and a population that is nearly impossible to contain, African societies have historically meshed the domains of animals and humans, to the point where zoonotic diseases have exponentially higher chances of developing and the damage produced is catastrophic. Zoonotic diseases are responsible for 2.2 million human deaths every year.<sup>3</sup> Due to Africa's high population density, and the breeding ground for life that comes with the influence of disease is heightened substantially. Interestingly, this issue is ameliorated when areas have access to certain resources. Africa is placed at a systematic disadvantage rendering them incapable of combatting disease. Areas such as China are densely populated, yet they have access to ample resources that prevent disease from occurring on a larger scale. The resources countries must have in order to fight against disease include: access to sterile water, access to immunization, and medical knowledge. The geography and environment of Africa create prime ground for bacteria and diseases to form, and due to the historical significance and impact that colonialism still holds, Africa is unable to fend off these diseases. The most important amenity for Africa is to have access to the resources that fight disease which will in turn attack poverty.

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<sup>2</sup> Laino, Charlene. Africa, the Infectious Continent. Msnbc.com. 2003. [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3072106/ns/us\\_news-only/t/africa-infectious-continent/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3072106/ns/us_news-only/t/africa-infectious-continent/).

<sup>3</sup> Bryner, Jeanna. 13 Animal-to-Human Diseases Kill 2.2 Million People Each Year. LiveScience. <http://www.livescience.com/21426-global-zoonoses-diseases-hotspots.html#sthash.GSgzGiYw.dpuf>.

The causes of the diseases are only half of the story. It is important to look at diseases that impact Africa currently, and how they are being addressed, as well as diseases that have been eradicated. The first disease that has particular significance is smallpox. Smallpox is the oldest of the diseases presented, and also the only one to be eliminated. This is significant because its impact was only diminished and eventually eliminated through modern medicine and public health working together through global public health efforts (World Health Organization, etc).<sup>4</sup> The history of disease in Africa is not a particularly successful one, but through concentrated global effort, the disease was able to stop destroying communities and ending millions of lives. History is one of the most important indicators of the future. This is also an influential case study because African societies created methods to prevent against smallpox long before modern medicine did. African indigenous knowledge may be a stone often left unturned, but the transfer of African medical knowledge to the West represents an important message for medical advances.<sup>5</sup> Sleeping Sickness is a disease that is often overlooked based on the relative lack of casualties compared to AIDS, or other major epidemics. There is an important reason to look at the impact of Sleeping Sickness, however. Although a pharmaceutical treatment has been available for over fifty years, it is not readily available to those in need in Africa.<sup>6</sup> This shows how even when resources do exist, and are available, society has a fundamental problem in equal health care practices and resource availability. Finally, AIDS, arguably the most devastating disease

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<sup>4</sup>Graboyes, Melissa. Exploring Disease In Africa. Boston University. African Studies Center. <http://www.bu.edu/africa/files/pdf/aids-text1.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

in the modern world, presents the most pressing and immediate impacts of disease in Africa. Unfortunately, even with all the awareness for AIDS, the world still falls woefully short in its resource allocation for this disease. “Out of some 26 million people who today need these life-saving drugs, only about 10 million are now getting them.”<sup>7</sup> With proper funding and resources, the AIDS pandemic would be greatly reduced. There is a certain humanitarian objective our society as a whole has not been able wrap its head around. Logically speaking, it would make sense that with more money, less disease would occur. But the constant stream of money into many of these African countries has actually hurt their development. An article published by the Cato Institute stated, “The record of Western aid to Africa is one of abysmal failure. More than \$500 billion in foreign aid — the equivalent of four Marshall Aid Plans — was pumped into Africa between 1960 and 1997. Instead of increasing development, aid has created dependence.”<sup>8</sup> With smallpox, a disease was eradicated through constant involvement in both domestic and foreign countries. With Sleeping Sickness, treatment is readily available, but not accessible. With AIDS, funding for allocation is becoming arbitrary. These three studies allow us to look at what has and has not worked in the past and find solutions that are beneficial to all.

There are four main factors that can influence the impact of diseases in an immediate manner. The first is to create accountable methods of dispersing funds. Currently the United Nations Development Program is in control of allocating funds to

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<sup>7</sup> Paulson, Tom. The World's Deadliest Killer Disease from Africa Is ... Still AIDS. *Humanosphere*. 2014. <http://www.humanosphere.org/global-health/2014/10/deadliest-killer-disease-africa/>.

<sup>8</sup>African Perspectives on Aid: Foreign Assistance Will Not Pull Africa Out of Poverty. Cato Institute. 2005. Accessed May 30, 2016. <http://www.cato.org/publications/economic-development-bulletin/african-perspectives-aid-foreign-assistance-will-not-pull-africa-out-poverty>.

fight disease and influence development. One of the issues is that there is no accountability or check on power because the UNDP prevents audits to be viewed by any external organization, even those from which it receives funding. This means that the organization itself decides whether they are effectively allocating these funds.<sup>9</sup> The first step is to amend the way global funds function. By increasing transparency, efficiency and accountability are bolstered. Secondly, entitlement needs to continue to be a factor in the prevention of AIDS and other diseases. Donors have created enormous entitlement to indefinite access to antiretroviral drugs in African nations. The act of entitlement is the right move, the allocation of funds and the accountability of the individuals allocating funds should not result in a decrease of funding. It would be unjust to reduce aid as a form of punishment instead of creating methods for efficient, transparent funding. In the sake of efficiency, policymakers from around the world need to create effective low-cost drugs and distribute them to the people of Africa. Low-cost drugs made in Africa, and to a lesser extent in India and China, fail quality tests at a higher rate than those produced in the West.<sup>10</sup> The time for selfishness and capitalism has passed. The world needs to be willing to provide for those in need, especially when the quality of Western medicine is substantially higher than any alternatives. The last resource that needs to become more prevalent is access to immunizations. Immunization saves up to three million children per year.<sup>11</sup> Increasing the rate of immunization in Africa will not only target specific diseases, but create a general trend of

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<sup>9</sup> Bate, Roger. Fighting the Major Diseases of Africa: Sustaining the Gains of the Last Decade. AEI. <https://www.aei.org/publication/fighting-the-major-diseases-of-africa-sustaining-the-gains-of-the-last-decade/>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Immunization. UNICEF. 2016

medical attention. The actions we as a society have to take make themselves clear. It is not against common knowledge or moral codes to help those in need. It is important to determine the most effective way of providing aid as well as fostering development for these countries to be able to have access to the resources available to the western world. It is up to our policymakers to create comprehensive, prudent, efficient legislation and actions in order to defeat disease.

Overall, the most obvious solution to combat disease is for the world to work together in order to find a solution. The causes of disease have put Africa in a compromising position where there is a high need for humanitarian aid. By looking at the three case studies presented in my research, it is easy to see what is effective and what is ineffective. Countries in Africa are in a position where humanitarian aid from Global funds is crucial. In order to be successful, our society needs to reform it's global funds as they currently fail to effectively provide resources to those in need. It is important that the best quality drugs are available to those who need it, and also that immunizations are increased. If the entire world, the global body, makes the conscious decision to treat disease at its most concentrated location, Africa can see its development spike, and the impact of these epidemics will be greatly reduced.

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