



Session One: Reducing The Cancer Threat For Women

The rise of cancer in sub-Saharan Africa has disproportionately affected women through breast, colorectal, endometrial, lung, cervical, skin, and ovarian cancers. Breast cancer deaths in the region have increased by 70% since the year 2000, and combined with cervical cancer, now cause one out of every five cancer deaths in sub-Saharan Africa¹. In contrast, breast cancer mortality rates have fallen in high-income countries. Despite being preventable by the HPV vaccine, cervical cancer rates on the continent are rising, and the disease is increasingly becoming a health threat only experienced by underprivileged women in low-income nations².

There is overwhelming evidence that investing in women's health provides significant economic returns. Addressing the burden of women's cancers in Africa should be considered a sound investment by governments across the continent. The case is compelling given the profound impact of these cancers on premature death and disability, with substantial and long-lasting social, financial and economic consequences for the affected women, their immediate family and their wider community.

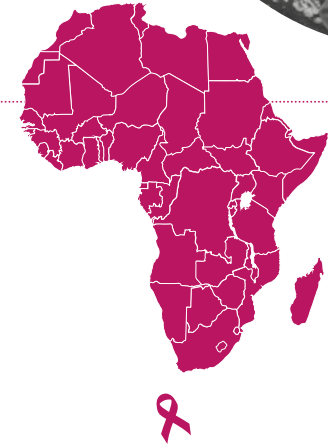
A growing number of African countries have shown their commitment towards achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by incorporating it into their national health strategies. The principles of UHC stress on accessibility, quality care, and financial risk protection. However, the burden of cancer among women is already having a profound impact across all three dimensions of UHC. Access to essential cancer services on the continent is characterised by significant inequalities.

Diagnosing and treating cancer requires more. It takes more health infrastructure, more clinics, more labs, more hospitals, more X-ray machines and MRIs and more skilled workers to make accurate diagnoses and perform radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and surgery. Where prioritisation and allocation of resources to cancer care are limiting and in the absence of governmental focus on this problem, public-private partnerships may be an avenue to provide effective cancer control. Public-private collaborations can leverage private sector economies of scale in service delivery, procurement, research and development as well as knowledge sharing system integrators.

Several African governments have formed working relationships with the private sector to help accelerate their commitment to cancer care and reach the last mile. However, a few investments and strategies have been deployed towards outlining the concrete approach to address cancer in women and how the private sector can be engaged to aid in the prioritisation of women's cancer at the national level. There is a strong need to increase the accessibility of female cancer screening and treatment services under the UHC platform to increase the continent's ability to develop, manage and implement programmes that support access within health systems.

¹ UICC, "Addressing Cancer Control with Universal Health Coverage", 2019.

² T. Bollyky, "The Growing Cancer Threat in Africa | Think Global Health", Council on Foreign Relations, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/growing-cancer-threat-africa>. [Accessed: 02- Sep- 2021].



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Breast cancer and cervical cancer now cause one out of every five cancer deaths in sub-Saharan Africa

The Session

The rising incidence of cancer in Women in Africa can no longer be overlooked, and urgent government funding and public-private partnerships are needed to help control the growing cancer burden. These programs will benefit not only the population at risk but also the economy of these countries since a large proportion of the cancer victims are in the prime of their lives.

The session seeks to provide an advocacy and action framework for radically improving progress toward closing the cancer divide for women in Africa.

Key areas of discussion will be:

- National and regional strategies supporting cancer for women under the UHC frameworks
- Awareness of cancer among women and the challenges they face in access, quality and finance.
- Innovation in cancer care for women: Private sector – what are they doing? How can they help?

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