

How one African health tech firm is expanding access to affordable health care in Africa

Across Central and East Africa, healthcare systems and providers face challenges in procuring and keeping key medical equipment and supplies in stock.



Source: Supplied. Viebeg's chief executive officer, Tobias Reiter and chief commercial officer Alex Musyoka.

As a result, there is a lack of access to important diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, ultimately leading to preventable deaths and other negative health outcomes for patients in under-resourced communities. At the same time, many patients are often forced to travel long distances for diagnoses at local hospitals resulting in inconvenience, long wait times, and higher prices.

Statista forecasts that the current health expenditure as a share of the GDP in East Africa will continuously decrease by 0.02% between 2024 and 2029. The share is estimated to amount to 4.38% in 2029. This is a problem because low healthcare spending is associated with issues like high infant mortality rates and low life expectancy.

Venture capital-backed African health tech company Viebeg Technologies is helping to expand access to affordable healthcare in Central and East Africa by aiding healthcare facilities in procuring supplies in real time. It uses artificial intelligence (AI) to manage supply chain processes (from shipping to warehousing, distribution and inventory management) to ensure that healthcare facilities have the precise medical supplies in stock.

Serving over 1,000 hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, and healthcare providers in Rwanda, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Viebeg stands out for its innovative data-driven procurement solution called VieProcure. This platform facilitates the efficient distribution of medical supplies, equipment, and pharmaceuticals, addressing critical supply chain challenges in the healthcare sector.

Founded in 2018 by chief executive officer Tobias Reiter and chief commercial officer Alex Musyoka, the company works with hospitals, clinics and healthcare providers to manage and expand their supply of medical products, devices and equipment critical to meeting the full range of patient needs.

“We are already making inroads in other parts of East Africa, including Kenya, Burundi and Congo, and serving over 500 facilities. The company plans to expand across Africa,” Musyoka says.

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In 2023, Johnson & Johnson Impact Ventures, an impact fund within the Johnson & Johnson Foundation, invested in Viebeg Technologies. Their investment supports the firm's plans to reach more providers and patients through continued growth and expansion in East and Central Africa – namely Rwanda, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

David Higgins, investments director at J&J Impact Ventures says: “Reliable supply of essential medical products is one of the most fundamental aspects of a health provider's success. We are excited to support and grow Viebeg's vital work in this space, strengthening the ability of health systems to provide care to their patients.”

Africa's focus on health tech has the potential to provide more affordable and accessible healthcare to the continent's 1.5 billion citizens. With 56% of Africans unable to access quality care, advances in technology - such as AI, data management, and connectivity - improving medical outcomes offer a real opportunity to leapfrog decades-long challenges.

Innovative procurement

Reiter says the firm's AI-driven medical procurement platform directly connects healthcare providers with manufacturers. This removes brokers and middlemen from the value chain, generating cost savings of up to 40% for customers.

Apart from improving revenues, the funding has enabled the company to, among other things, conduct training for its employees, access working capital, and employ more workers. They have built a digital platform that serves as a one-stop-shop for supply chain and logistics services, including ordering, shipping, warehousing, last-mile distribution and inventory management.

They have strengthened these providers' resilience against external shocks, such as climate disasters and civil unrest, allowing them to avoid shortages and protect their patients' access to essential care.

The company supports healthcare partners at every step with the help of sophisticated AI-powered software that organises data on regional health demands, supply trends and patient demographics. They also ensure affordability, offering crucial financing support through flexible payment plans and financing partners. Since launching, they have successfully helped over 500 health providers with care to more than 900,000 patients.

“When medical supply chains fail, providers have limited ability to give care to their patients, leading to poor health outcomes. We are combating that with comprehensive services and AI-powered insights. When providers have all the equipment and supplies they need, they can better meet their patients' needs - the ultimate goal,” adds Reiter.

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