Health ministers from the G7 countries met in Kobe in September 2016 to discuss the implementation of the G7 Ise-Shima Vision for Global Health, which was announced at the May G7 Summit hosted by Japan. On the sidelines of this meeting, JCIE organized a panel to cultivate new corporate stakeholders in the global health field and explore the role of corporations in achieving the G7 Ise-Shima Vision, as well as the broad health-related aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Businesses and Global Health

The event focused on the role of the corporate sector in achieving two of the key goals of the G7 Ise-Shima Vision—preparing for and responding to public health emergencies and ensuring access to quality health services for all. Following a keynote speech by Ray Nishimoto of Sumitomo Chemical, several business leaders described the innovative partnerships their companies have forged while representatives from government agencies, academia, and international organizations talked about the value they place on corporate engagement and lessons they have learned from their partnerships with the private sector.

The discussion started from the premise that it is no longer a question of if there will be another threat to global health security on the scale of the recent Ebola crisis in West Africa; rather it is a question of when it will happen, where it will emerge, and what the pathogen will be. But the next pandemic is most likely to originate in a country with a weak, vulnerable health system without the capacity to respond quickly and decisively. This argues for prioritizing health system strengthening and promoting universal health coverage so that currently fragile health systems become better able to prepare for outbreaks and deal with them quickly and effectively before they become unmanageable. Some countries in Africa were able to stop Ebola’s spread quickly and effectively, and these cases may offer useful lessons about how to leverage and support domestic resources and capabilities for better preparedness in the future.

Davide Mosca of the International Organization for Migration talks about the complexity of health challenges during emergencies.

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The challenges involved in strengthening health systems and expanding access are complex and require hard work from all sectors of society—government, civil society, academia, and the corporate sector—from around the world if they are going to be overcome. Every societal sector in every corner of the world is at risk of being hurt by the next pandemic, and each one brings its own unique strengths to the table. Representatives from the Japanese and Italian governments—which are serving as G7 president in 2016 and 2017 respectively—reaffirmed not only the importance of corporate engagement in the health field but also the importance of carefully designing collaborative arrangements so that each sector brings its added value to the table and complements the others.

Several speakers suggested that this kind of recognition from governments and international organizations should lead to the creation of mechanisms to incentivize corporate engagement in global health. For example, the Global Fund has created mechanisms to leverage the core competencies of companies from a variety of industries and apply them to making the fight against communicable diseases in low-income countries more effective and efficient.

Model Cases of Corporate Engagement

Focusing on the role of corporations in the global health field, panelists illustrated how companies from a variety of sectors—not just health—are able to contribute in the health space. Several innovative examples of corporate engagement in global health were presented:

Sharing Technology to Build Local Capacity (Sumitomo Chemical)

After developing mosquito nets with built-in insecticide, allowing them to remain effective longer, Sumitomo Chemical decided to transfer the technology for free and help expand net manufacturing in Africa. This proactive approach to local production and distribution not only helped get more effective nets to families who need them—in turn contributing to the global reduction in malaria cases and deaths in the past decade and a half—it also contributed to more sustainable local employment and economic development. The company’s top management is committed to playing an uninterrupted role in developing new products and remaining a leader in the fight against malaria.

The Quest for Effective Drugs (FUJIFILM)

The recent Ebola crisis in West Africa set off an urgent scramble to find drugs that would be effective in the face of the rapidly spreading and highly fatal disease. FUJIFILM, which made a major move into the pharmaceutical industry with its acquisition of Toyama Chemical in 2008, found that a drug it had already developed for influenza might be effective against Ebola as well, and it began partnering with the French government to test the drug’s effectiveness and make it available to patients who became infected in Guinea. In the long term, stockpiling potentially effective drugs is a critical global priority that can significantly reduce the impact of a pandemic. But in the recent Ebola crisis, even just having a drug candidate had a positive impact because it gave patients hope and a reason to go to health facilities rather than resigning themselves to dying at home, a practice that was further fueling the spread of infection. This was a risky proposition for FUJIFILM since any problems could mean that it would have to pull the drug from the market entirely, including for its on-label use against the flu.

Managing Supply Chains Better (NEC)

Even when effective drugs are available, they do not always reach the people who need them in a timely manner. Not
only does weak transportation infrastructure impede their delivery, particularly to rural areas, but many countries lack the capacity in supply chain management that is needed to anticipate where and when drugs and other products will be needed, monitor how much supply is in stock, and transport new stock to where it is needed. In 2016, NEC Corporation became the first Asian company to join a pandemic supply chain management scheme led by the World Food Programme. The company’s expertise in information technology helps in building and maintaining the platforms that are needed to manage supply chains more effectively during an epidemic.

**Insuring against Pandemics (Swiss Re)**

Responding to pandemics is a costly endeavor, and raising the necessary funds takes time, meaning that we often miss crucial windows for stopping their spread before they spiral out of control. The Ebola crisis demonstrated the need for a stream of funding that can be mobilized immediately when a pandemic is identified as being in the early stages, and that led to the creation of a pooled insurance scheme, spearheaded by the World Bank, called the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF). Swiss Reinsurance Company has joined donor countries and other international organizations in the PEF to ensure that the scheme runs as effectively as other types of insurance, such as car insurance, so that funds can be disbursed quickly when and where they are needed.

**Using Drones to Deliver Health (AeroSense)**

Diagnosing and treating illnesses often requires moving blood and tissue samples safely and rapidly to laboratories and moving drugs and other products quickly to patients who need them. But poor transportation infrastructure makes this rapid movement impossible in many places.
Following advances in the use of drones to deliver small packages quickly and efficiently, some drone manufacturers have begun to explore whether their machines can be used to drastically reduce the transit time needed for moving health products to where they are needed. AeroSense has joined in this innovative work and is exploring a partnership with the Zambian government to begin using drones there, where much of the population lives in hard-to-reach rural areas.

Training Health Workers (Amref Health Africa)
As the only major international NGO headquartered in Africa, Amref Health Africa has found that corporate partnership is crucial to its mission of strengthening health systems on the continent, expanding access to quality health services, and helping medical professionals prepare for the next pandemic. It works with pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca to bring education and testing for hypertension, diabetes, and other chronic diseases to rural communities and link those who are diagnosed with these conditions to treatment. It also provides leadership training for health facility managers in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Johnson & Johnson, and Philips.

Strengthening Laboratory Capacity (Nagasaki University)
Nagasaki University partnered with Toshiba Medical to develop a rapid diagnostic test for Ebola that was piloted in Guinea with support from the Japanese government. The partnership went beyond simply developing and deploying the tool to include training for local laboratory technicians in Guinea so that they could continue their important surveillance role even after Guinea was declared Ebola free.

Key Takeaways

- The seemingly disparate goals of preparing for and responding to pandemics during a crisis and expanding access to quality health services in non-crisis times are intrinsically linked. Strengthening health systems and expanding access are key steps toward preparing for a public health emergency, and higher levels of preparedness will in turn help to limit the devastating effect that a pandemic will have on the health system.

- The SDGs require greater cross-sectoral cooperation than their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This is because they are more comprehensive and they focus on the complex way in which threats facing communities around the world interrelate. Also, they acknowledge that everyone—government and the private sector alike—has a responsibility to work toward achieving the goals, not just the developing countries that were the target of the MDGs. As such, cross-sectoral partnerships on health that help advance the aims of the SDGs are more important than ever.

- Recognition of the importance of corporate engagement in the global health field has grown over the past decade, and the discussion has moved beyond simply the value that corporations bring to the table or the benefits they receive from engagement in global health. Now the discussion, which was set in motion at this event, needs to focus on optimal modalities for cross-sectoral partnership.