

Mpox and Inequality: A Public Health Emergency Overlooked

September 8, 2024

September 8, 2024: Kinshasa, DRC: By Saturday evening, **Democratic Republic of Congo** (DRC) received 200,000 doses of the MVA-BN, a M-pox vaccine, manufactured by the Danish company Bavarian Nordic. The vaccines were donated by the European Union, through HERA, the bloc's agency for Health Emergencies.



September 5, 2024: Kinshasa, DRC: 100,000 doses of the JYNNEOS vaccine, being off-loaded in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (DRC)

A year has passed since the initial emergence of a more lethal variant of the M-pox virus was identified in Central Africa. During 2024, till the end of August, 2024, there have been over 20,000 reported cases and more than 575 deaths, primarily among children. The Eastern region of **DRC** and the small country of **Burundi** have been the hardest hit.

Two years ago, a milder variant of M-pox had been detected in Europe and USA. Vaccination efforts were implemented quickly, but no further steps were taken to identify the source and to take precautionary steps for spread of the infectious disease.



In mid-August, 2024, the **World Health Organization** (WHO) announced that the mpox outbreak was a “public health emergency of international concern.” While countries globally observed the situation with anxiety, not many acknowledged that this crisis could have been prevented if the authorities at WHO and UNO ceased viewing a significant portion of humanity as expendable.

Two years ago, we received an early warning when a milder variant of mpox spread to Europe and the United States. Vaccination efforts were implemented by those Governments. Once the initial panic subsided, particularly in Washington, London, and Brussels, Western governments amassed large vaccine reserves for themselves.

On the other hand, the Governments in Central Africa, where M-pox has been prevalent for two decades, made no efforts for eradicating the disease. Nor did the Governments of the region or the African Union made any effort to activate WHO, even though many of the officers at WHO are from Africa.

It was only during the past week that Africa received its initial vaccines. On August 27, USAID sent 10,000 doses to Nigeria, and on September 5, the DRC got 100,000 doses.

Many parties share the responsibility for this situation, but the core issue, as highlighted by the shocking inequality seen during the global COVID-19 vaccine distribution, is that some lives appear to be valued less. In fact, they seem to be less important than the wealth accumulation of a select few. Profit takes precedence over their lives.

India is actively working to support Africa and the Global South in coping with Mpox (monkeypox) through various initiatives led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister and the Indian Pharmaceutical Association.

INDIA: PHARMAVY of the WORLD: After WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, the Government of India enhanced surveillance, testing, and public awareness campaigns in all the States of India to manage the disease.

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** is leveraging the infrastructure and expertise developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to aid other nations, particularly in Africa. **Dr. S. Jaishankar**, the External Affairs Minister and the **Indian Pharmaceutical Association** have taken the initiative to work with WHO to determine the needs of the world.

The **Indian Pharmaceutical Association**, along with major pharmaceutical companies like the **Serum Institute of India (SII)**, is actively involved in developing and manufacturing M-pox vaccines. SII has already started working on an M-pox vaccine, to ensure that India and other developing countries have access to necessary medical interventions.

Dr. S. Jaishankar has reiterated India's dedication to supporting the Global South through initiatives like **Vaccine Maitri** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaccine_Maitri), which aims to provide affordable and accessible vaccines to the countries in the Global South, including Africa.

By **Abel** from Burundi
