

News Release

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New Partnership to Fight Schistosomiasis in Ethiopia

- **Partnership with NALA Foundation and the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health**
- **Three-year health education pilot project targets population of approximately 266,000 children**
- **Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, focuses on supporting integrated approaches to control and eliminate schistosomiasis**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 13, 2017 – Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, a leading science and technology company, today officially signed a three-year partnership with the NALA Foundation to create greater awareness of schistosomiasis in Ethiopia. The NALA Foundation, a non-governmental organization fighting against the root causes of Neglected Tropical Diseases, will support the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health by applying a community participatory approach. With this newly launched project, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is expanding its schistosomiasis-related health education and awareness activities in Africa.

With its Praziquantel Donation Program, which marked its ten-year anniversary in 2017, more than 19 million tablets to treat the disease have been made available to Ethiopia. This makes the country the second largest recipient of the medicine and has permitted treatment of around 7 million school-aged children. “Providing treatment is an important first step to reduce the intensity of infection. However, children currently need to be treated again every year. Therefore, we need to look beyond donations and actively fight the high risk of reinfection,” said Johannes Waltz, Head of the Praziquantel Donation Program from Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany.

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The new pilot project is aimed at preventing children from becoming reinfected with the severe tropical worm disease. Besides creating greater awareness of schistosomiasis, it is crucial to trigger behavioral change at a young age to reduce both the risks of contamination of people and recontamination of water. The project will start in the Bench Maji zone, located in southwest Ethiopia, in the district called Mizan Aman. More than 80% of school-aged children there are affected by schistosomiasis. By applying a community-based approach, the educational tools and materials will be tailored to local customs and deliver easy-to-understand messages that match specific community needs and the living environment. The pilot will give insights into best practices and apply the lessons learned across the Bench Maji zone. “Community empowerment and mobilization are central to prevent and control schistosomiasis,” said Zvi Bentwich, President and Founder of the NALA Foundation.

The objective is to support the implementation of a holistic approach to attain sustainable impact, particularly in highly endemic areas, and lower the prevalence of the disease through control and elimination. “In addition to treatments, our strategic national focus is to integrate health education and water, sanitation and hygiene to make behavioral change possible,” said Biruck Kebede Negash, Director of the Disease Prevention and Control Department of the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health.

As part of its corporate responsibility strategy, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is supporting the World Health Organization (WHO) in the fight against the worm disease schistosomiasis in Africa. Since the start of the its Praziquantel Donation Program in 2007, more than 150 million patients, primarily school children, have been treated. To this end, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, has donated nearly 700 million praziquantel tablets – a gold standard of treatment – to WHO. The substance is well tolerated and the most effective treatment to date for schistosomiasis. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, also develops schistosomiasis therapies for very young children, performs early research on new drugs, diagnostics and transmission control. Furthermore, the company supports educational and awareness programs in Africa and cooperates with partners in the Global Schistosomiasis Alliance.



About schistosomiasis

Schistosomiasis is a chronic condition and one of the most common and most devastating parasitic diseases in tropical countries. It is estimated that more than 200 million people are infected worldwide and that around 280,000 die from it each year. Flatworms transmit the disease. It is widespread in tropical and subtropical regions where large sections of the populations have no access to clean water and sanitary installations. People become infected with the parasite via contact with freshwater, for example while working, swimming, fishing or washing their clothes. The miniscule larvae penetrate human skin, enter the blood vessels and attack internal organs. The infection rate is particularly high among school-aged children. Praziquantel is the only active ingredient with which all forms of schistosomiasis can be treated. WHO has therefore deemed praziquantel, the most cost-efficient solution for the health of patients in need, as the drug of choice.

About the Praziquantel Donation Program from Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, initiated the Praziquantel Donation Program in cooperation with WHO back in 2007. Since then, nearly 700 million tablets have been donated and over 150 million patients treated, mainly school children. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, has committed itself to maintaining its efforts in the fight against the tropical disease until schistosomiasis has been eliminated. To this end, each year the company is donating up to 250 million tablets to WHO. The planned annual donation has a value of US\$ 27.5 million. In addition, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is supporting awareness programs at schools in Africa in order to educate children about the causes of schistosomiasis and ways to prevent it. Furthermore, as part of a public-private partnership, the company is researching a new formulation of praziquantel that can also be administered to very young children. To date, the tablets are only suitable for children older than six.

About NALA Foundation

Since 2008, NALA (NTD Advocacy, Learning, Action) has worked to eliminate Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Ethiopia. To date, NALA's work has led to a drastic reduction in disease prevalence of schistosomiasis and intestinal worms in project areas. Their holistic model achieves sustainable and measurable results in NTD elimination by complementing mass drug administration with intensive health education, community mobilization, and community-led improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). NALA's health education and community campaigns focus on school children and

women as the primary messengers of change in health practices for the family. NALA also trains and supports local partners, stakeholders, and community volunteers to lead and continue these efforts.

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About Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is a leading science and technology company in healthcare, life science and performance materials. Around 50,000 employees work to further develop technologies that improve and enhance life – from biopharmaceutical therapies to treat cancer or multiple sclerosis, cutting-edge systems for scientific research and production, to liquid crystals for smartphones and LCD televisions. In 2016, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, generated sales of € 15.0 billion in 66 countries. Founded in 1668, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is the world's oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company. The founding family remains the majority owner of the publicly listed corporate group. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, holds the global rights to the „Merck“ name and brand. The only exceptions are the United States and Canada, where the company operates as EMD Serono, MilliporeSigma and EMD Performance Materials.