



# The Exemplar

January 2021

Hi Friend,

African nations have, with some exceptions, been spared the very worst of COVID-19. This may be due, according to [recent reports](#), to multiple factors, including the widespread use of masks, early lockdowns in some countries, and less co-morbidity – including the fact that three quarters of Africa’s population is under 35. Another factor may be that many African nations have significantly more experience with infectious diseases.

This insight has inspired us to highlight some of the global health successes in Africa that offer important lessons for other countries as they try to recover from COVID-19.

What unifies these varied successes is political commitment, donor coordination, and a solution-driven approach to program design. Each of these will likely play a large role in determining the outcome of the pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.

We’ve notably featured Ethiopia as a positive outlier in three of our topic areas – stunting, under-five mortality, and community health workers. Between 1992 and 2016, the country [reduced its stunting rate](#) from 67 percent to 38 percent and [reduced its under-five mortality rate](#) by 56 percent between 2000 and 2015.


A key factor in both these successes was the fact the government drastically expanded primary health care by training and deploying 40,000 Health Extension Workers. We take a deep dive into this program, below.

We also feature our research on Liberia’s dedicated CHWs. This cohort has expanded access to primary health care to 70 percent of rural residents and helped the country recover from the Ebola epidemic and years of civil war.

Finally, we look at Rwanda’s success at reducing under-five mortality by 67 percent following the 1994 genocide by deploying evidence-based programs to address malaria, malnutrition, prevent mother to child HIV transmission and improve vaccination coverage, among other things.

If you’d like to know more about our research on any of these programs, please ask us [how we can help you](#) through our services and research team.

Best wishes,  
Niranjan Bose

 **Gates Ventures**  
Niranjan Bose, PhD  
Managing Director, Health and Life Sciences

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## PLATFORM FEATURES



### Lessons from Ethiopia: Reaching rural residents with CHWs

Written by: *Mengesha Admassu, Nan Chen, Luidina Haiju, Tanya Jones, Kyle Muther, Raj Panjabi, and Matt Price, in collaboration with the International Institute of Primary Healthcare-Ethiopia*

In 2001, Ethiopia had some of the worst health indicators in the world, driven in part by low health-seeking behavior in rural areas, a lack of access to health care facilities, and a shortage of health care workers. Nearly half of all deaths were from easily preventable or treatable diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, rotavirus, and pneumonia. In response, Ethiopia trained a highly effective corps of 40,000 community health workers to deliver a package of 16 preventive and curative services targeted at the most common and deadly health challenges. Later, it deputized three million volunteers to support the health workers, magnifying the impact of its investment.

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### Lessons from Liberia: Delivering Health Care Following Crisis

Written by: *Nan Chen, Bernice Dahn, Carla López Castañeda, Kyle Muther, Raj Panjabi, and Matt Price, in collaboration with the University of Liberia, School of Public Health*

Following the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic, Liberia’s health minister gave the blunt assessment that the country’s “lack of paid, well-supported CHWs helped fuel the spread” of the deadly disease. In response, the country – the third poorest in the world – trained and launched an ambitious and professional CHW program to serve every village, no matter how remote. These nearly 4,000 CHWs have not only helped significantly improve the treatment of diseases such as pneumonia, malaria, diarrhea, but they have also served as an early warning system to alert authorities of potential epidemics. Today, they carry out one million home visits a year and are helping educate villagers on preventing the spread of COVID-19.

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### Lessons from Rwanda: The Power of Rigorous, Evidence-based Interventions

Written by: *Lisa Hirschhorn, Felix Sayinzoga, Caroline Beyer, Kateri Donahoe, and Agnes Binagwaho*

Rwanda’s 1994 genocide killed one million people, displaced two million more, and left its health care system in shambles. Since that time, the nation has made extraordinary gains in protecting the health and lives of its youngest citizens by rigorously focusing on evidence-based interventions that have significantly reduced the incidence of diseases such as measles and malaria.

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