Beyond Borders: Exploring Multinational Enterprises' CSR Efforts for Health Equity in Developing Countries - The Case of Johnson & Johnson

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John Cabot University

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Beyond Borders: Exploring Multinational Enterprises' CSR Efforts for Health

Equity in Developing Countries – The Case of Johnson & Johnson

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Abstract

As corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices become essential and necessary for multinational enterprises (MNEs), consumers find themselves skeptical about such commitments. As a result, MNEs must prove that their interventions are making a positive impact rather than using social responsibility initiatives as marketing strategies. A pillar of social responsibility is making healthcare accessible and affordable worldwide. In developing countries, access to healthcare is limited, and a lot of harmful diseases pose a threat to millions of people's lives. In such contexts, the role of pharmaceutical corporations and their interventions becomes crucial. This research paper is a detailed review of Johnson & Johnson's strategy for enhancing healthcare access in developing countries, especially Sub-Saharan Africa. This study analyzes Johnson & Johnson's engagement in CSR efforts to enhance access to healthcare in emerging countries. Using a single case study design, we investigate the company's investments in healthcare initiatives, infrastructure, stakeholder engagement, availability of services, and accessibility in the African region. While impressive progress has been made, areas for improvement still emerge. Ultimately, implementing CSR in the healthcare sector has shown to be a complex and sensitive issue. Necessary recommendations are made on how to amplify the outreach of corporate initiatives at a higher level to solve health disparities in developing countries.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; healthcare access; pharmaceutical industry; developing countries; Johnson & Johnson.

Introduction

In a world where Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is often under scrutiny, multinational enterprises (MNEs) are frequently caught between their promises of positive impact and the perception of their actions as mere marketing strategies (Sheehy, 2015, p. 626). This tension not only underscores the complex expectations placed on these corporations but also raises questions about the authenticity of their commitments (Mohr et al., 1998, Kim and Lee, 2009, Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013, cited in Alhouti et al., 2016). As stakeholders increasingly demand genuine sustainability, the responsibility of MNEs to deliver tangible benefits grows (Alhouti et al., 2016). This pressure is particularly intense in industries like healthcare, where the impact of corporate actions is directly linked to human well-being. The core of CSR is social responsibility, the extent to which corporations pursue practices that benefit society and go beyond profit maximization (Preuss et al., 2016). The crucial role of social responsibility, especially in improving healthcare access in developing countries, is therefore undeniable (Droppert & Bennett, 2015, p. 2). However, this goal is juxtaposed with significant challenges, such as shortages of healthcare workers, lack of infrastructure, and financial barriers (Gitau, 2023). These obstacles underline MNEs' difficulties in translating CSR promises into tangible outcomes. They also highlight the need for a strategic approach that aligns corporate actions with actual needs on the ground, ensuring that efforts to improve healthcare are well-intended but also practical and sustainable.

Despite the critical importance of healthcare access in developing countries, the attention given to this issue by MNEs within the field of CSR still needs to be improved within the existing literature. This knowledge gap persists as healthcare access is a sensitive and critical issue, particularly in underdeveloped regions where socioeconomic disparities are pronounced. Moreover, the complexity of healthcare access difficulties, including inadequate resources, infrastructure deficiencies, and cultural barriers, poses significant challenges that traditional CSR initiatives alone may not sufficiently address. A significant impediment to advancing knowledge in this area is the limited availability of comprehensive and clear data (Droppert & Bennett, 2015, p. 6). MNEs' reluctance to share data on their actions hinders a thorough analysis and evaluation of CSR initiatives'

effectiveness. Despite acknowledging healthcare as a critical CSR priority in developing countries, the literature often overlooks the complexities of healthcare delivery in resource-constrained settings. As a result, there is an urgent need for research that examines the unique challenges faced by MNEs operating in the healthcare sector in developing countries and identifies innovative, holistic approaches to address them.

Our study explores and assesses the impact of pharmaceutical corporations' initiatives in developing nations, particularly on healthcare access. The main aim is to examine how pharmaceutical businesses' efforts address the healthcare needs of vulnerable populations and whether such initiatives have a practical impact on improving their healthcare systems. With an exploratory approach, we analyze both qualitative and quantitative data on the case of Johnson & Johnson's healthcare initiatives in Africa. Our findings suggest that MNEs must invest in resources, influence, and global reach to enhance access to healthcare in developing countries. Our study helps MNEs develop alliances and networks with stakeholders, such as other healthcare companies, governments, and NGOs, from a strategic management perspective, creating a balance between less developed countries and already prosperous economies.

Literature Review

Contemporary businesses are identified as significant participants in addressing global concerns and fostering sustainable development. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Corporate Governance (CG), and Sustainability of Organization (SO) are highlighted as critical approaches to enable this achievement (Virakul & Russ-Eft, 2019, p. 202). Specifically, CSR has become an indispensable component of modern business development and success, highlighting the increasing attention towards the role of corporations beyond mere profit-making and maximization. "CSR empirically consists of clearly articulated and communicated policies and practices of corporations that reflect business responsibility for some of the wider societal good" (Matten & Moon, 2008, p. 405). However, the precise implementation of responsibility remains voluntary, and the direction of practices lies at the complete discretion of corporations. In general, the stress is on the proactive attitude of modern organizations concerning sustainability and societal well-being.

Among the countless applications of CSR, "adopting progressive human resource management programs, developing non-animal testing procedures, recycling, abating pollution, supporting local businesses, and embodying products with social attributes and characteristics" (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 117) are just a few. In this respect, the framework of the "triple bottom line" developed by John Elkington in 1994 is relevant today more than ever. Instead of exclusively focusing on the "bottom line," the generation of profit, firms should evaluate corporate performance considering two additional "bottom lines," the social and environmental impact (Russo, 2008, p. 49).

CSR has as many potential benefits as challenges. The first obstacle to overcome is the need for a shared definition of CSR. Although it is possible to have a reasonably detailed idea of what it is, there is no comparable and systematic way to define and measure the implementation and effectiveness of CSR practices. This is the consequence of countless different and, in some cases, divergent approaches that hinder compelling critique and evaluation. In addition, critics often raise doubts about the authenticity of CSR, pointing out the risk of falling into greenwashing – that is, "businesses claiming environmental credentials and other social contributions while continuing to generate excessive harms such as social costs." (Sheehy, 2015, p. 626).

When it comes to CSR, it is fundamental to understand the "CEO effect" on it because how companies stick to the strategy is not given by chance but by CEOs' strategic decisions (Wernicke et al., 2022, p. 1; Yuan et al., 2019, p. 391). Only when a company faces significant external pressure to engage in CSR are managers more likely to prioritize such initiatives, thus reducing the direct impact of CEO competence on CSR outcomes (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 393). Indeed, CEOs are key decision-makers regarding CSR strategies and implementation within organizations. They have the authority to set the tone for ethical behavior, sustainability practices, and social responsibility initiatives within their companies. Studies have indicated that CEOs with a strong commitment to CSR can positively impact their firms' CSR performance. Evidence from extensive, important surveys has shown that in most firms, "CSR is in the realm of CEOs' direct responsibilities" (Wernicke et al., 2022, p. 5). For example, "in the 2007 UN Global Compact Annual Review, 71% of the firms surveyed named the CEO as the level in charge of managing and developing CSR strategies." (United Nations, 2007, p.

10; Wernicke et al., 2022, p. 3). Observing how CEOs' behavior can be connected to better or worse CSR performance is also intriguing. For instance, theories show how firms led by materialistic CEOs have a lower CSR score than those led by non-materialistic CEOs (Davidson et al., 2019, p. 102).

Furthermore, stakeholders increasingly expect organizations to demonstrate interest in CSR activities. Employees are key stakeholders with significant influence over a company's ambitions. However, there has been limited exploration of their underlying motivations around CSR (Koch et al., 2019, p. 303). Employee engagement encompasses both potential and current employees: current employees represent the corporate brand, and potential employees' intentions are based on their perception of the employer's attractiveness. CSR influences employer branding and significantly impacts a firm's attractiveness to potential employees. Exemplary CSR conduct may enhance employer brand perception, while CSR misconduct can lead to skepticism and doubts about the sincerity of the firm's CSR efforts (Carlini et al., 2019). Employees' perceived benefits are central to understanding their motivations to participate in CSR activities (Koch et al., 2019, p.313). Based on Alderfer's ERG theory about the three self-oriented needs (existence, relatedness, and growth), three clusters of employees' benefits in the CSR context have been identified. Functional, Emotional, and Meaning and Morality, respectively, refer to tangible or intangible advantages that employees gain from participating in CSR activities, the feelings and emotions experienced by employees when discussing or participating in CSR activities, and abstract meanings and moral values at an individual level, often related to personal development and a sense of contribution to society (Koch et al., 2019, p. 309). By identifying and addressing these perceived benefits, companies can better tailor their CSR initiatives to meet employees' needs and enhance their engagement, leading to higher employee retention, a better brand reputation, and a more effective attractiveness not only to new employees but all stakeholders (Koch et al., 2019, p. 313).

Not only is CSR affected by CEOs' performance and employees' perception, but it is also heavily shaped and demanded by the firm's external environment (Leisinger, 2005, p. 583). This strategy plays a vital role in building positive relationships with consumers and local communities since it addresses their interests and needs beyond just profit maximization (Preuss et al., 2016). CSR initiatives that align with stakeholders' and consumers' values are tremendously helpful for a

business, as they can lead to greater performance, improved productivity, and increased corporate value (Elmassri et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2022, p. 700). One of the main aims of CSR is to position the company as environmentally or socially responsible in the minds of customers and stakeholders (Elmassri et al., 2023). Therefore, it is essential for firms to show such commitment by delivering reliable CSR reporting with accurate, detailed, and verifiable information (Demir & Min, 2019). As a result, if stakeholders and customers believe that the company's commitment to its CSR activities is strong, the firm can enhance its reputation, strengthen its competitive advantage, and build trust (from the external environment), thus assuming a unique position in the market. Furthermore, CSR initiatives benefit enterprises and the communities in which they operate as they improve the quality of life and promote social progress (Preuss et al., 2016). For instance, consider investing in healthcare. Businesses that invest in such fields, whether through medical funding, more affordable healthcare services, or supplying infrastructure in emerging countries, significantly contribute to the country's long-term socioeconomic growth. Simultaneously, from the stakeholders' perspective, such investments reflect a solid commitment to addressing critical social concerns while also significantly impacting the welfare of emerging communities.

Focusing on the healthcare industry is crucial because it directly impacts people's well-being and quality of life. Unlike other sectors, the consequences of shortcomings in healthcare can be life-threatening. Additionally, healthcare is often intertwined with socioeconomic factors, making it especially pertinent in underdeveloped nations with pronounced disparities. The primary social responsibility of firms in the healthcare sector is to provide services to society that meet their health needs, as well as to use resources wisely to improve the quality of care and to select the most appropriate setting to provide an effective and efficient healthcare service (Russo, 2016, p. 324). However, to deliver high-quality medical treatments, businesses must implement complex administrative and financial systems, invest in costly technology, and employ highly skilled professionals. These are challenging to sustain if businesses want minimal costs (Russo, 2016, p. 325). This is particularly relevant in underdeveloped nations, where high-quality conditions are challenging due to poverty, lack of resources (financial, medical, and technological), and inadequate infrastructure. Indeed, healthcare is the number three CSR priority issue in South Africa (Makka et al.,

2019). Therefore, it is in such contexts where CSR implementation becomes even more critical, as healthcare firms have a significant influence in terms of working with disadvantaged communities, assuring citizens' health in the best way possible, and minimizing the disparities of less fortunate groups (Russo, 2016, p. 326).

Recently, CSR in the pharmaceutical industry, previously regarded as a concept that needed to be treated by the concerned stakeholders, has received serious attention from both academia and practitioners, especially in developing countries (Inekwe et al., 2021, p. 238). Providing healthcare for nations with less affluence needs to shift its focus from unproven to proven interventions, including eliminating the huge differences caused by income, which is a significant problem (O'Donnell, 2007, p. 2825). This addresses the various system demands, which include a lack of skills, limited learning opportunities, and cultural deficits. The suggested concepts include comprehensive strategies such as offering everybody access to the primary necessities and specific ways to tackle the diseases. Based on specific policy measures, such as community financing, microcredit programs, and conditional cash transfers, examples of progress in addressing barriers are already seen. However, most still need further evaluation regarding local settings (O'Donnell, 2007, p. 2825).

Due to their direct impact on health, CSR policies established in the pharmaceutical industry must be closely monitored. For instance, according to a study that focused on how the leaders of the industry demonstrated similarities and differences in their reports on CSR, healthcare-involved companies excel not only in the adequacy of their CSR reporting but also outperform other industries (Demir & Min, 2019, pp. 12-13). Furthermore, according to a research study conducted in the context of the pharmaceutical sector in Jordan, CSR significantly impacts business performance (Sharabati, 2018, p. 576). The study revealed that implementing a company's CSR activities successfully improved business performance by considering all three dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. The high score for environmental responsibility clearly showed that the integration of sustainability planning into a company's strategy represents the paramount importance of sustainability. With this appreciation, it is evident that integrating CSR into corporate strategy reduces environmental indolence, helps businesses succeed, and benefits communities. Also, an Iranian pharmaceutical case researched the importance of Total Quality Management (TQM) as a mediating

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factor in the CSR-organizational performance relation (Mehralian et al., 2016). The findings revealed that incorporating CSR into operations and management combined with adherence to proper quality management systems significantly increased organizational performance. This shows the integration of CSR and TQM, demonstrating that organizations that take a holistic approach to stakeholder interests and quality management may have the highest gains. In addition, an investigation involving Pakistani medical firms revealed the effect of CSR disclosure on financial performance (Malik & Kanwal, 2018, p. 71). The research indicated that firms experienced a stagewise uptrend in CSR disclosures and that brand equity is a moderating variable intervening in the positive association between reporting and financial performance (Malik & Kanwal, 2018, p. 71). The achievement of these deductions highlights the critical role that CSR plays in the pharmaceutical sector. Adhering to moral and legal guidelines and providing comprehensive CSR disclosures guarantees businesses sound financial records and positive brand perceptions, in addition to satisfying regulatory obligations. Accordingly, these studies show a comprehensive perspective of what CSR is in the pharmaceutical industry, which is now becoming twofold, where strategic benefits and ethical implications are of equal importance. Specifically, one of the fundamental aspects of CSR in the healthcare sector involves ensuring equitable access to healthcare services.

Methodology

This study investigates how MNEs implement CSR activities to improve access to healthcare in developing countries. We use an exploratory approach, which allows an in-depth understanding of how these corporations navigate complex contexts to address a pressing global challenge like access to healthcare.

Following purposive sampling (Yin, 2009, pp. 38-53), we selected Johnson & Johnson as our sample case to investigate our research questions. Johnson & Johnson is a healthcare company that develops, manufactures, and markets consumer healthcare products, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices. It offers pharmaceuticals in the therapeutic areas of immunology, oncology, neuroscience, infectious diseases and vaccines, pulmonary hypertension, cardiovascular, and metabolism (Johnson & Johnson, 2024). Its medical devices include general surgery, biosurgical, endomechanical, and

energy products, electrophysiology products, vision products, and ophthalmic products. Additionally, through retail outlets and distributors, Johnson & Johnson distributes its pharmaceutical products, medical devices, and consumer products to retailers, wholesalers, healthcare professionals, and hospitals. It has a business presence across the Americas, Europe, Asia-Pacific and Africa. The company is headquartered in the US (Johnson & Johnson, 2024).

Several key factors were taken into account for this choice. "As the world's largest, most diversified healthcare products company" (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.), Johnson & Johnson is renowned not only for its innovative medical solutions but also for its dedicated commitment to societal welfare. Founded in 1886, Johnson & Johnson is based on the main principle of responsibility and has always shown efforts to go beyond mere profit-making and address pressing global health disparities. The company's credo is "to put the needs and well-being of the people first" (Johnson & Johnson, 2023), and was crafted by Rober Wood Johnson, former chairman and member of the company's funding family in 1943 before the term "corporate social responsibility" was even heard. Analyzing CSR implementation for health in developing countries allows us to examine how Johnson & Johnson navigates complex socio-economic and cultural contexts to deliver impactful healthcare solutions. Additionally, targeting developing countries aligns with broader global health agendas, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 – "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (United Nations, n.d.).

We collected secondary data between January and April 2024, such as scientific papers, rated newspaper articles, web-based information, company reports, and statistics. To ensure uniformity and minimize inaccuracies among data collectors, the research team had extensive knowledge of the research objectives, data collection procedures, and instruments. Lastly, to guarantee the accuracy and trustworthiness of our findings, we reviewed existing literature and consulted experts on the subject matter. In this way, we included various insights that strengthened the validity of our research design and data collection methodologies.

Theoretical Framework

Based on our analysis of the relevant literature, we have developed and identified four clusters of variables that determine access to health services in developing countries: stakeholder engagement, quality, availability, and accessibility. These variables are part of our theoretical framework that will guide our data collection and analysis on Johnson & Johnson's CSR activities in improving healthcare access in developing countries. Figure 1 summarizes the determinants of our theoretical framework and Table 1 explains the respective components.
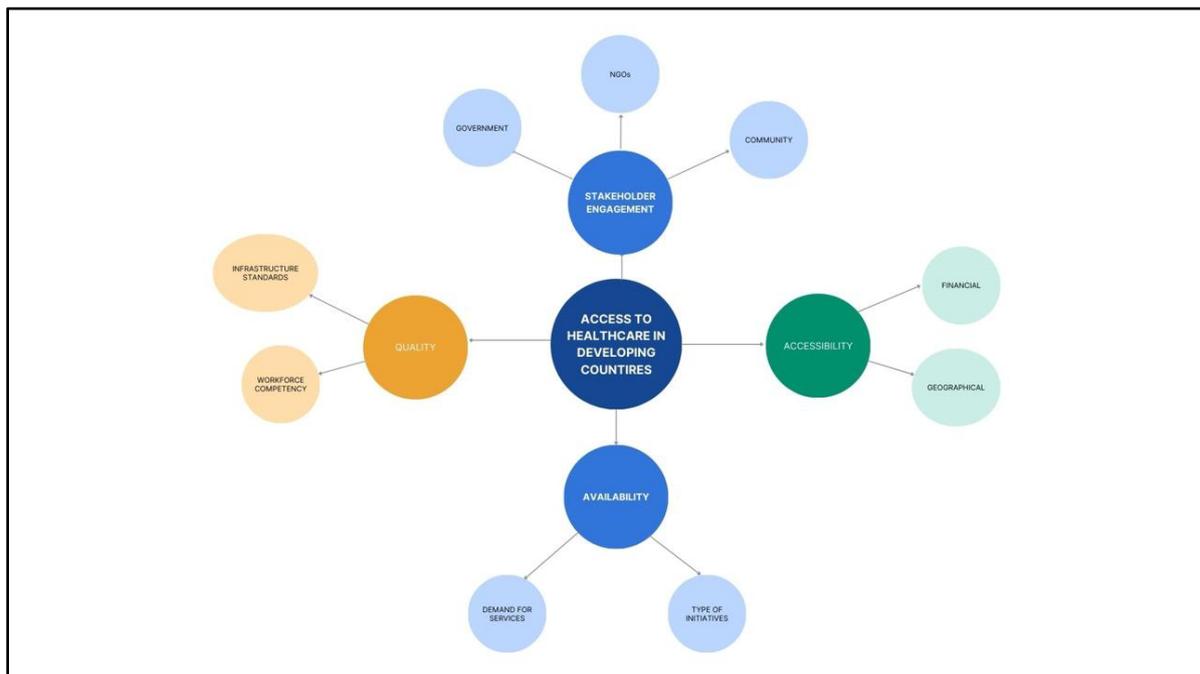

Figure 1: Determinants of healthcare access in developing countries

Cluster	Variables		
Stakeholders Engagement	**Government**	**NGOs**	**Community**
	Assessing the involvement of governments and local authorities in Johnson & Johnson's initiatives. Examining partnerships, collaborations, and regulatory support from governmental bodies in implementing healthcare access programs.	Assessing the engagement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Johnson & Johnson's CSR efforts. Evaluating partnerships, joint projects, and resource-sharing arrangements with NGOs to enhance healthcare access.	Assessing the engagement of local communities in the CSR initiatives. Measuring community participation and decision-making within healthcare initiatives.
Quality	**Infrastructure Standards**	**Workforce Competency**	
	Assessing the quality and adequacy of healthcare infrastructure supported by Johnson & Johnson's CSR initiatives. Evaluating factors such as availability of medical facilities, equipment, technology, and adherence to safety and hygiene standards.	Assessing the competence and capacity of healthcare personnel involved in delivering CSR services. Considering training, skills development, and professional standards	
Availability	**Demand for services**	**Type of Initiatives**	
	Assessing the demand for healthcare services within the targeted communities. Considering factors such as population health needs, disease prevalence, and demographic trends	Assessing the specific types of CSR initiatives undertaken by Johnson & Johnson to improve healthcare availability. Categorizing initiatives based on their nature and their focus areas.	
Accessibility	**Financial**	**Geographical**	
	Assessing the financial barriers to healthcare access faced by targeted communities. Considering factors such as out-of-pocket expenses, affordability of healthcare services, health insurance coverage, and financial support mechanisms.	Assessing the physical accessibility of healthcare services. Considering factors such as proximity to healthcare facilities, transportation infrastructure, and service delivery.	

Table 1: Explanation of theoretical framework determinants

Findings

In the following, we synthesize our case study findings according to the four clusters developed in our theoretical framework. At the end of this section, Table 2 summarizes the information discovered.

Stakeholder Engagement

Government. Johnson & Johnson is committed to engaging with policymakers, health systems, and governments. The engagement methods include collaboration and partnerships, philanthropy, employee volunteering, and sponsorships. The company participates in trade associations and policy development organizations to develop well-considered policies that reflect diverse perspectives. It engages with stakeholders to advocate for solutions for the healthcare industry and supports policy development activities. The company supports candidates and political initiatives that align with its commitment to medical innovation, fair market systems, and broad access to quality healthcare. It operates within legal and ethical frameworks, making corporate political contributions primarily to electoral campaigns of individual candidates and state election campaigns. On this note, Johnson & Johnson demonstrates a commitment to transparency by disclosing its political contributions and engaging in responsible lobbying practices. It provides lists of political contributions made by its Political Action Committee and corporate entities, aligning with disclosure and accountability standards (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.). However, this political commitment is limited within the African continent. As far as Africa is concerned, Johnson & Johnson announced the official launch of its global public health strategy in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2016. The company, announcing the news, reported that it would partner with "governments, donors, non-profits, and multilateral institutions" (Johnson & Johnson, 2016). Nonetheless, no explicit information directly addresses Johnson & Johnson's engagement with African governments. On the contrary, there are multiple news articles talking about Johnson & Johnson being under investigation in South Africa over excessive drug prices (Africanews, 2021) or about African recalls such as children's cough syrup that was found to have high levels of toxicity (Reuters, 2024).

NGOs and Community. As for community engagement, Johnson & Johnson states that it includes organizational memberships, direct engagement, sponsorships, educational programs, conferences, and research collaboration (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.). Within the African continent - particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, facing worker shortages and financing difficulties - community health workers (CHWs) are essential contributors to bridging healthcare gaps, even though they face challenges such as lack of adequate support, training, and remuneration (Gitau, 2023). Specifically, the initiative "Africa Frontline First Catalytic Fund" was aimed at mobilizing resources to support salaried CHWs and strengthen community health services. It was part of the Johnson & Johnson Center for Health Worker Innovation's 10-year, $250-million commitment to support one million nurses, midwives, and community health workers by 2030 (Johnson & Johnson, 2022). Additionally, there is evidence of country-specific workshops in Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Uganda aimed at strengthening community health systems and advancing Universal Health Coverage (Gitau, 2023). Johnson & Johnson's community engagement in Africa is strictly related to engagement with partners and NGOs, with whom the company works closely to craft programs tailored to each country. Among the commitments are "Saving and Improving the Lives of Women and Children," "Preventing Disease in Vulnerable Populations," and "Strengthening the Healthcare Workforce." Figure 2 exhibits the company's partners in Africa, published in 2016.

Quality

Infrastructure Standards and Workforce Competency. Johnson & Johnson's contributions in Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate a robust commitment to improving healthcare infrastructure, specifically focusing on innovation and technological advancements. The company's Africa Innovation Challenge (AIC) has provided a platform for six promising local companies to address healthcare problems with cutting-edge solutions, such as a portable, solar-powered phototherapy crib for treating neonatal jaundice, a mobile phone-based hearing test, and an app for efficient medical supply delivery (Rabbit, 2019). In addition to the direct improvement of healthcare infrastructure, Johnson and Johnson has recently partnered with The World Continuing Education Alliance (WCEA), The Aga Khan University School of Nursing and Midwifery East Africa (AKU), and The International Council of Nurses (ICN) to support over 600,000 nurses and midwives in Sub-Saharan

Africa and the Middle East. This partnership is particularly relevant to granting quick and efficient access to knowledge for frontline health workers, with the long-term goal of training and increasing the competence of medical workers involved in delivering CSR initiatives (Janssen, 2020).

Availability

Demand for Services and Type of Initiatives. Johnson & Johnson is highly concerned with making sure everyone has access to healthcare, particularly in developing countries. Indeed, the pharmaceutical company is actively engaged in combating illnesses that have a detrimental impact on the world's underprivileged populations. HIV, Ebola, and Tuberculosis are some of the diseases that pose a threat to the lives of such people, causing them to either go misdiagnosed and live with the illness or die. Johnson & Johnson is firmly dedicated to protecting such countries from mortality and stopping the spread of infection. Some of the initiatives that are being pursued by Johnson & Johnson regard the supply of drugs and treatments, as well as the development of preventive vaccines.

HIV is an immune deficiency virus that harms the body's immune system ((*About HIV/AIDS*, 2022). This disease affects every country in the world. In 2022, a total of 34 million women and men lived with HIV worldwide, with 69 percent living in Sub-Saharan Africa (*HIV/AIDS in Africa (Africa)*, n.d.). Indeed, HIV is one of the most dangerous hazards in Africa, endangering millions of individuals' lives and health. Johnson & Johnson is committed to changing such situations and assisting those concerned. Currently, the pharmaceutical company is testing a new HIV vaccine that is able to prevent infection (Marquez, 2021). Moreover, as part of its dedication to providing equal access to medicines for all people worldwide, in 2021, Johnson & Johnson launched the initiative to use medical drones to deliver HIV treatments. The first drone flew in Uganda in April 2021, delivering HIV medical medications to individuals in need (Johnson & Johnson, 2021). While the mainland country's HIV rate was dropping, Uganda's islands were suffering a 25% spike per year (Goad, 2021). Thanks to innovative technology, Johnson & Johnson was able to support the islands' communities and efficiently deliver life-saving treatments.

Ebola is another virus that has spread rapidly in developing countries. The latter is predominantly found in Sub-Saharan Africa (*Ebola (Ebola Virus Disease)*, 2023). Following the 2014 fatal Ebola outbreak in southern Guinea and Sierra Leone, which killed over 10,000 people, Johnson &

Johnson acknowledged the necessity of developing a preventive vaccination to avoid future infections (Marquez, 2021). Indeed, when another Ebola outbreak occurred in Congo in 2018, Johnson & Johnson intervened by giving vaccine supplies (up to half a million) to prevent illness spread. Currently, in West Africa, more than 160,000 people have been vaccinated thanks to such an initiative (Marquez, 2021).

Another initiative demonstrating Johnson & Johnson's efforts to improve global healthcare access is their commitment to ending the global tuberculosis epidemic by 2030 (SDG 3) (Marquez, 2021). Tuberculosis is the world's second-greatest infectious illness killer after COVID-19. Only the African region accounts for one-quarter of the 2.5 million people affected in 2022 (*Tuberculosis (TB)*, 2024). The pharmaceutical company has been working intensely on developing effective tuberculosis therapies, investing significantly in the R&D process (more than $500 million) (Crain, 2022). In addition, since 2015, Johnson & Johnson has been distributing their Multidrug-Resistant TB (MDR-TB) treatment in South Africa, procuring over 70,000 courses for patients in need (Johnson & Johnson, 2023). In September 2018, Johnson & Johnson started a 10-year TB initiative to enable access to treatments and locate undiagnosed individuals. The company is pursuing this initiative in South Africa by cooperating to address gaps in pediatric and adolescent Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (DR-TB) treatment through contact tracing and advocacy (Crain, 2022).

Accessibility

Financial and Geographical. Accessibility has always been a major concern in the pharmaceutical sector, particularly in underdeveloped nations. It is essential to understand the meaning of "accessibility" before discussing the issue. According to Pharmacy Software, "in the pharmaceutical industry, accessibility means providing equitable service to every patient, regardless of background, abilities, or circumstances" (*How to Make Your Pharmacy More Accessible*, 2023). On the contrary, because of these barriers about necessary medications and technologies, access to treatments is a pressing problem that needs to be solved for individuals in need. Because of their high expenses, poor infrastructure, and inadequate healthcare systems, emerging nations like those in Africa are far less developed and sophisticated than they were a generation ago. Johnson & Johnson's contribution to healthcare in developing countries has its roots in 1930 when it first opened its doors in South Africa, and "in the nearly 90 years since, the company has remained committed to helping

address unmet global public health needs that have impacted the country and the region as a whole" (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). In the interview with Alex Gorsky, former chairman and CEO of Johnson & Johnson, he highlighted how vital it is for them to work in South Africa, the center of hope, progress and also "home to our Global Public Health organization's Operations Center'' (Palmer, 2016). Today, Johnson & Johnson is active in over 100 collaborations and projects throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, including Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, to assist people of all ages and backgrounds, ranging from child health to treating diseases such as HIV, Tuberculosis, Ebola, and neglected tropical diseases (Johnson & Johnson Impact Ventures, 2023). Another significant development that highlights Johnson & Johnson's efforts was the opening of the pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in Cape Town in January 2016, which required 300 million rand (15.978.300.00 $) in infrastructure and technology to allow the company to serve more than 25 markets in Sub-Saharan Africa (Palmer, 2016). These efforts made Johnson & Johnson the "2nd-ranked company globally in the 2022 Access to Medicine Index" (Johnson & Johnson, 2022).

We support efforts in more than 30 countries in Africa including: Angola, Burkina Faso, Botswana, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Cote D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Together with our partners, we work on country-specific programs as well as several capacity building efforts that span multiple African nations.

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital (www.hamlinfistula.org)

Aga Khan University (www.aku.edu)

American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)

AmeriCares Foundation (www.americares.org)

Amref Health Africa (amref.org)

Born Free Africa (bornfreeafrica.org)

CARE (www.care.org)

CDC Foundation (www.cdcfoundation.org)

Children Without Worms (www.childrenwithoutworms.org)

Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital (www.chrishanibaragwanathhospital.co.za)

Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation (www.ccbrt.or.tz)

CURE (cure.org)

Direct Relief International (www.directrelief.org)

Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (www.pedaids.org)

Engineers Without Borders (ewb-usa.org)

Family Care International (familycareintl.org)

FHI 360 (www.fhi360.org)

Firelight Foundation (www.firelightfoundation.org)

Fistula Foundation (www.fistulafoundation.org)

Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (www.gimpa.edu.gh)

Global Business School Network (www.gbsnonline.org)

Global Fund for Women (www.globalfundforwomen.org)

Global Health Corps (ghcorps.org)

Grassroot Soccer (www.grassrootsoccer.org)

Helen Keller International (www.hki.org)

Helping Babies Breathe (www.helpingbabiesbreathe.org)

Interchurch Medical Assistance (www.imaworldhealth.org)

International Rescue Committee (www.rescue.org)

IVUmed (www.ivumed.org)

MAMA (www.mobilemamaalliance.org)

Malawi Surgical Initiative (www.med.unc.edu/msi)

Medical Teams International (www.medicalteams.org)

Mercy Ships (www.mercyships.org)

Mission for Essential Drugs & Supplies (www.meds.or.ke)

mothers2mothers (www.m2m.org)

Nairobi Surgical Skills Center (www.nssc.co.ke)

Operation Smile (www.operationsmile.org)

Philips Healthcare Technologies (www.healthcare.philips.com)

Planet Aid (www.planetaid.org)

Praekelt Foundation (www.praekeltfoundation.org)

Princeton in Africa (www.princetoninafrica.org)

Rand Corporation (www.rand.org)

Save the Children (www.savethechildren.org)

Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (www.nursingsociety.org)

SOS Children's Villages (www.sos-usa.org)

Tostan (www.tostan.org)

UCLA (www.ucla.edu)

UCLA Anderson School of Management (www.anderson.ucla.edu)

United Nations Foundation (www.un.org)

UNFPA Campaign to End Fistula (www.endfistula.org)

UN H4+ (www.unfpa.org/h4plus)

UNICEF (www.unicef.org)

University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (www.gsb.uct.ac.za)

USAID (www.usaid.gov)

U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (www.pepfar.gov)

Water for Good (icdinternational.org)

West African College of Surgeons (www.wacscoac.org)

World Wildlife Fund (www.worldwildlife.org)

Figure 2: Johnson & Johnson partners in Africa (Our community work in Africa, 2015, p. 8)

Cluster	Variables			Demand for Services	Type of Initiatives
STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT	**Government:** Johnson & Johnson engages with government entities, policymakers, and health systems.	**NGOs/Community:** Johnson & Johnson engages with NGOs and community organizations.			
	Engagement Methods: Collaboration & Partnerships, Philanthropy, Employee Volunteering, Sponsorships, Policy Development.	**Engagement Methods:** Organizational Memberships, Direct Engagement, Sponsorships, Educational Programs, Research Collaboration.		**HIV/AIDS:** The demand for HIV/AIDS services is high, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa where the disease affects millions.	For HIV/AIDS, they are testing a new vaccine and using innovative methods like medical drones for treatment delivery.
	Political Engagement: Supports candidates and political initiatives aligning with its values, operates within legal and ethical frameworks, discloses political contributions and engages in responsible lobbying.	**Community Health Initiatives:** Support for community health workers (CHWs) in Africa through initiatives like the Africa Frontline First Catalytic Fund and country-specific workshops aimed at strengthening community health systems and advancing Universal Health Coverage.	AVAILABILITY	**Ebola:** With the threat of Ebola outbreaks in developing countries, there's a demand for preventive measures and vaccination during outbreaks.	In response to Ebola, they are developing preventive vaccinations and providing vaccine supplies during outbreaks.
	African Engagement: Limited information, but announced a global public health strategy in Cape Town, South Africa. However, faced issues such as investigations over drug prices and product recalls.			**Tuberculosis:** Tuberculosis remains a significant health concern, especially in Africa, necessitating effective therapies and initiatives to combat the epidemic.	To tackle Tuberculosis, they have committed to ending the epidemic by 2030, investing in R&D, distributing treatments, and launching initiatives to improve access to treatments and identify undiagnosed individuals, with a particular focus on South Africa.
QUALITY	**Infrastructure standards:** Johnson & Johnson's Africa Innovation Challenge (AIC) provides a platform for local companies to address healthcare problems with innovative solutions, contributing to improving healthcare infrastructure.	**Workforce Competency:** Johnson & Johnson's partnership with various organizations supports over 600,000 nurses and midwives in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, aiming to grant quick access to knowledge and increase the competency of medical workers involved in delivering Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.	ACCESSIBILITY	**Financial Accessibility:** The company invests in infrastructure and technology, such as the pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in Cape Town, to improve access to medications in developing countries..	**Geographical Accessibility:** Johnson & Johnson is actively engaged in over 100 collaborations and projects throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, including major cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban.

Table 2: Summary of findings

Discussion and Recommendations

Despite Johnson & Johnson's global public health strategy launch in South Africa in 2016, there appears to be limited explicit news addressing the company's direct engagement with African governmental bodies. This suggests that while the company's commitment may be genuine, its involvement in African governmental affairs may be less pronounced and more indirect than in other regions. Moreover, negative news coverage concerning investigations into drug pricing practices and product recalls in Africa raises questions about the company's accountability and practices. These discrepancies indicate a need for Johnson & Johnson to ensure alignment with its stated commitment and show transparency. For instance, the company could release periodical updates (with quantitative data or testimonies) to prove its efforts, along with the progress achieved to mitigate the consequences of unfavorable news.

While Johnson & Johnson emphasizes its commitment to community engagement through partnerships and programs, the effectiveness of these efforts remains to be determined. The list of partners published in 2016 underlines the challenge of relying on outdated data. The absence of recent information – both in the news coverage and even on the company's webpage – raises questions about the current status of the company's partnerships in Africa and the effectiveness of its community engagement efforts. For instance, by searching online "Johnson & Johnson Community Work in South Africa," it appears to be a dedicated section that, once clicked, shows the message "We are sorry, but no matter how closely we have looked, we cannot find that page." Therefore, once again, there is a need for greater clarity when communicating the initiatives to the general public.

Moving on, Johnson & Johnson frequently emphasizes its role in improving and equipping healthcare infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is necessary to note that the available literature exclusively refers to initiatives targeting major urban areas. This suggests a potential urban bias, resulting in a neglect of remote communities with limited access to these resources. Furthermore, concerns regarding such projects' long-term sustainability, particularly maintenance costs, necessitate further investigation. However, Johnson & Johnson's partnerships with the WCEA, the AKU, and the ICN contribute to sustainable healthcare improvements that, if well-implemented, will outlast physical

infrastructure. In addition, training and upskilling of nurses, midwives, and medical workers is necessary to ensure that healthcare services are not only available but also operational and of high quality. To fully understand the effectiveness of these programs, systematic evaluation mechanisms should be implemented. Without impact measurement, it is not easy to assess these initiatives' success and the possible improvement areas. Indeed, another initiative that Johnson & Johnson may consider carrying out is to improve healthcare education in developing nations. The shortage of healthcare workers represents a crucial issue in such a vulnerable setting. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most affected regions (WHO, 2009). In Nigeria, "there is one doctor for every 5,000 patients, whereas the average in developed countries is one doctor for about every 254 people'" (Olufemi, 2023). Not to mention that by 2030, such a shortage will reach a peak of 6.1 million (*Chronic Staff Shortfalls Stifle Africa's Health Systems*, 2022). As a consequence, vulnerable communities, in addition to struggling to provide the bare minimum of healthcare standards, are now at risk of being unable to provide care and support to those affected by harmful infectious diseases, such as HIV, Ebola, and Tuberculosis (Naicker et al., 2009). Therefore, Johnson & Johnson may consider promoting or establishing health education programs to teach locals about disease prevention, detection, and treatment options.

Johnson & Johnson's initiatives to improve global healthcare access, particularly for underprivileged areas, are still impressive. The company is actively moving beyond simply providing treatments. It is striving for innovation by finding new therapies to eventually eradicate harmful diseases that threaten the lives of millions of people. Not to mention using technology to reach vulnerable people in remote locations and offer them assistance and care. Johnson & Johnson's efforts emphasize the necessity of taking a stand and working together to tackle health disparities.

Finally, Johnson & Johnson is working very hard to make drugs available in Sub-Saharan countries, for example, by opening new plants in Cape Town and through the different initiatives of the company within the regions. However, the high prices of the treatments make them unaffordable to such vulnerable communities. Consequently, to improve the South African healthcare system, the government should commit to strengthening the purchase of necessary medications by reforming current patent rules that limit access to vital drugs to those in need. This may be accomplished by balancing the public and pharmaceutical corporations' interests, establishing policies that allow

patented medications to be made available to the general population, and setting fair pricing. Johnson & Johnson represents a crucial player with which to collaborate to reach this goal, thus ensuring that no one is left behind in accessing essential medicines. Furthermore, the pharmaceutical company, being one of the global key players in the drug development process, may consider participating in finding a solution to the health challenges, specifically regarding the accessibility of drugs in developing countries. Other than the company's already accomplished initiatives in opening new plants, such as the one in Cape Town, whose aim is to facilitate access in Sub-Saharan countries, Johnson & Johnson can consider joining product development partnerships and public-private partnerships. By creating a bridge between the public and private sectors, the company would be able to alleviate all the problematic issues that African regions constantly face, such as the lack of public financing for health care and constant reliance on third-party funds (Stevens & Huys, 2017). Moreover, this cooperation would also allow for the exchange of knowledge and technologies to create new ways of distributing drugs in third countries, avoiding high transportation costs.

Limitations

We experienced various limitations with our research that represent areas of further inquiry and should be addressed in future studies. While collecting and analyzing secondary data that provided comprehensive insights on Johnson and Johnson's interventions in improving healthcare access in the African region, due to the sensitivity of the topic, the sourced secondary data information is limited. This might be due to privacy concerns, political reasons, or data-sharing restrictions. Furthermore, despite several attempts, we faced limitations in collecting primary data through interviews with Johnson & Johnson's CSR representatives on their CSR strategies. Therefore, this constraint in data collection may bias the interpretation of our results on Johnson & Johnson's healthcare efforts. Finally, since this study focuses on analyzing Johnson & Johnson's initiatives in enhancing access to healthcare in Africa, future researchers might extend the domain of the research to multiple cases in the pharmaceutical industry as well as other emerging and developing regions.

Conclusion

The central purpose of our study was to examine the effectiveness of pharmaceutical corporations' CSR interventions in improving access to healthcare in developing countries. In investigating the case of Johnson & Johnson's initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa, it emerged that significant gaps still need to be addressed despite its commitments to mitigating health disparities. The latter include urban bias in infrastructure development, uncertainty about long-term sustainability, the recurrent problem of lack of funding, and the affordability of medicines. At the same time, we must acknowledge the company's efforts to improve healthcare through investing in the R&D of drugs tailored to the developing country's needs and innovative solutions for improved accessibility, such as medical drones. Ultimately, to enhance its battle for equal access to healthcare, Johnson and Johnson should aim to create synergies and merge resources by strengthening its partnerships with local communities, NGOs, and governments. Such a multi-faceted fight demands public-private collaborations for tangible, sustainable, and long-lasting results. By fostering such cooperations, MNEs, in general, will have the breakthrough opportunity of playing a transformative role in providing equitable worldwide healthcare access. Finally, MNEs should focus on enhancing their monitoring and evaluation processes to better quantify their initiatives' impact and promptly adapt strategies based on feedback from diverse stakeholders. Increased accountability and transparent, measurable outcomes could solidify trust and attract further investment into CSR programs, amplifying their effectiveness and reach. Thus, strategic adjustments alongside committed collaborations could significantly advance the global healthcare landscape.

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