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Vaccines are sexy ... when they matter to the West

If it is true, as the title of the event suggests, that "not all vaccines are sexy", how can governments be motivated to work together to solve inequalities in the access to vaccines? Large economic groups are the major players in this process, from creation to distribution. However, if the private sector operates in positive synergy with governments, then the pharma market and healthcare can coexist.

This was discussed today in Trento at the former Augustinian monastery, headquarters of the Training Center for International Cooperation, during the roundtable entitled "(Not all) Vaccines are sexy". Inequalities between the North and South of the World", organized by Medici con l'Africa-Cuamm and the Bruno Kessler Foundation (FBK).

"Access to healthcare should not be a privilege", scientific journalist and chair of the event, Giancarlo Sturloni, stated. But in reality, data shows that 90% of the investments in medical research benefit just 10% of the global population. Furthermore, while only a few cases of ebola reached during the height of the epidemic, the West has developed about ten new vaccines, as underlined by Stefano Merler, mathematical epidemiologist of the Bruno Kessler Foundation. Between the global north and the global south, the biggest difference in the development and use of vaccines is the difference between a needs based approach and a preventative based approach. In the west, vaccine research is not always driven by needs. Some are created when the western community is frightened and reacts, usually backed by large economic and interest groups. This panel argues that investments in vaccine development should change to become more prevention-oriented rather than profit-oriented.

When looking at the inequalities in healthcare around the world, moving to prevention-oriented vaccine development is a large step in the right direction. Minister Sara Ferrari cites that 20% of African children do not have access to existing vaccines. Changing our approach to vaccines would help insure that 90% of the investments in medical research can benefit more than just 10% of the global population. We must bear in mind that health is not just the absence of disease, but it is community wellbeing. A wellbeing deriving from various causes that contribute to the health of the population. This was showcased by the FBK teamed with Cuamm to monitor and analyze their vaccination data and find out how to intervene more effectively in Africa, and beyond. This is an example of synergy between different actors that expresses and confirms the commitment of Trentino, through FBK and many local associations, in the field of development cooperation.

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