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## STUDY SHOWS GREATER WILLINGNESS AMONG COMPANIES TO OPEN UP Move to better access to drugs a welcome change

A study by the Netherlands-based non-profit organisation Access to Madicine Foundation has highlighted that GlaxoSmithKline, Merck and Novartis are leading attempts to make medicines available to people in developing countries. The study says pharma companies have given more insight into their policies and actions to increase people's access to med-

icines in developing countries.

While the top three are familiar names, the surprising entry at the fourth rank is that of Gilead, which

- one of its top-selling products. Trailing Gilead are Sanofi and Roche, which are vigorously exploring newer methods of improving market access.

In India, Gilead has entered into manufacturing deals with companies like Emcure and Strides but at the same time, it is embroiled in litigations with Cipla over Viread.

Wim Leereveld, who heads the Dutch foundation, has said that the 2010 rankings show important progress, if only because companies have shown far greater willingness to open up.

The study notes that several new organisations and funding mechanisms have been established both in terms of increasing attention as well as business opportunities.

In India, that trend has become strongly visible from the moves made by Sanofi Aventis, GSK and Novartis, to toss a

few names. Other smaller companies like Novo Nordisk have gone deeper in their disease man-DIMMENT agement approach. Pillman Essentially, these companies have to

markets anti-retroviral drug Viread an extent recognised that business can grow only when linkages are built with the local population. This is akin to what Unilever is trying to do with its own consumer products businesses throughout India.

> However, not enough is being done on improving access of medicines to treat neglected diseases. The Dutch agency says neglected tropical diseases continue to cause significant health burden, while research to develop treatments for them remains limited. Diarrhoea and pneumonia are the biggest



child killers in poor countries. while AIDS, TB and malaria are taking ever increasing tolls.

made in the study is about greater collaborations in the field of research to develop drugs relevant to poor countries. Increased sharing of intellectual property, such as "compound libraries" for research purposes and several high-ranking originator companies increasing collaborations with generic companies, especially through non-exclusive voluntary licensing arrangements, are indicated by the authors of the study as progressive steps in improving access to important drugs.

Without referring to GSK's big initiative to open up its library of anti-malaria compounds for open sourcing and patent pooling, Access to Medicines study said they have proved to be some of the most innovative in the sector. The same point is made for efforts taken by Merck and Novartis. Merck is taking a very strong commitment on developing vaccines in partaership with the Wellcome Trust and is working on establishing a large base in India.

The generic industry has also been seen favourable to increasing access of medicines in developing countries. The study says more research work has been done for adapting existing products to the Another important observation needs of developing countries and there are emerging examples of capacity advancement in the poorer countries.

> Another interesting trend captured is of high ranking generics companies forming increasing collaborations with originator companies through non-exclusive volun-

tary licensing arrangements. It is heartening that the study ranked three Indian companies -Ranbaxy, Cipla and Dr. Reddy's as those having significant market presence in the developing countries and carry out adaptive research for diseases covered under the index.

The other companies figuring in the analysis are Mylan, Sun Pharma and Teva. The study has, however, pointed out that the general low level of disclosure and responsiveness to data request hampered the analysis of generic companies.

If this pursuit gathers momentum, those who need medicines would have greater access to them. The change is already visible. In frontline African countries, it is noticed that the basic drugs are becoming available. In fact, this may have already resulted in the AIDSrelated deaths plummeting in many smaller countries

Drug makers appear to be on the right course. As a senior executive from a multinational company said several decades ago, if medicines are made and patients are treated, profits will follow.

> Pillman is an executive closely linked to the global pharma industry.

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