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Health Technology

A to Z Textile Mills, Ltd: Long-Lasting Anti-Malaria Bednets

The Challenge

Nearly one million people in Africa die every year from malaria, costing more than \$12 billion annually. Bednets are one of the most effective means for preventing the transmission of malaria. Traditional nets kill mosquitoes on contact but are prone to tearing and must be re-treated with insecticide every few months, at too high a cost for most people.

The Innovation

Acumen Fund has facilitated the transfer of technology for the manufacture of a long-lasting insecticide-treated bednet from Sumitomo Chemical, Ltd. to A to Z Textile Mills, Ltd. The production and distribution of the bednets is made possible through a public-private partnership involving Acumen Fund, A to Z, ExxonMobil, Sumitomo, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF.

These long-lasting nets are made from a durable plastic material blended with insecticide, allowing them to remain effective for five years without re-treatment while resisting tears. A to Z has made further innovations, such as:

- Establishing a new weaving method that uses 20% fewer raw materials
- Using the material for inexpensive window and door coverings
- Producing the net in several colors that are more attractive to African consumers

Leadership

Anuj Shah is the CEO of A to Z, the largest privately held manufacturer of bednets in Africa. A to Z employs approximately 1,600 workers and currently produces six million traditional bednets annually, for distribution in Tanzania and other African countries. A to Z is also one of the lowest cost manufacturers in Africa, due to an intense focus on innovation and productivity.

Investment Strategy

Acumen Fund has provided A to Z with a \$325,000 loan to support the technology transfer, initial production and distribution of long-lasting insecticide-treated bednets. Acumen Fund's investment has financed the purchase of plant and machinery to start two production lines with the capacity to manufacture approximately 380,000 bednets per year. Acumen Fund also provides project management expertise for the complex public-private partnership.

OUTPUT: A to Z has produced 250,000 nets, at a current rate of 60,000 per month, and has hired 100 new employees, primarily women.

IMPACT: A \$7 bednet can protect a family from malaria for five years. Workers who produce the new nets earn higher wages than others.

SYSTEM CHANGE: Our investment is supporting a new model for public-private partnerships, as well as the development of new distribution channels.