SPECIAL INTERVIEW TO BILL GATES

Devoting rest of my life to eradicating infectious diseases

Forbes JAPAN interviewed to Mr. Bill Gates in Tokyo in December.
Why does the richest man in the US invest in global health?

Mr. Makoto Takano (Editor-in-Chief of Forbes Japan and CEO of Atomixmedia)
Mr. Gates, you have invested your time and money in philanthropic activities, especially in the fight against infectious diseases. There are many global health organizations that work on these issues; why did you invest in the GHIT Fund specifically?

Mr. Bill Gates
One important reason I support GHIT is its effective engagement of Japanese pharmaceutical companies; their involvement in and contributions to global health activities carry great benefits. Product development is very difficult, and some important and potentially game-changing contributions from the companies that participate in GHIT are their chemical libraries for research for new drugs, as well as their very talented scientists. GHIT has already invested in over 50 projects and some projects will give big impact in the future.

However, pharmaceutical companies cannot create and deliver needed global health tools alone. Partnerships between different sectors are critical to lasting impact. In addition to the technology and innovation of pharmaceutical companies, investment from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Wellcome Trust based in the UK, and the Government of Japan is also extremely important. I hope the Government of Japan recognizes that the GHIT model is successful and continues to support GHIT for the next five years.

Mr. Takano
What kind of impact we can expect from the new products developed through R&D partnerships?

Mr. Gates
Many diseases still lack effective vaccines and medicines. For example, effective HIV, TB, and Malaria vaccines do not yet exist. TB patients need to take drugs for at least half a year, and HIV patients must take ARV drugs throughout the course of their whole life. In both cases, the rigors, cost, and time commitment of treatment can result in low adherence and relapse of
disease. New tools that reduce treatment time and cost vastly improve adherence while exponentially improving health outcomes. With regard to current global health R&D activities to address these challenges, one example is the development of a new single-dose malaria treatment; the current regimen lasts three days.

The reason why we are so ambitious about solving these problems is that we know new tools can make an enormous difference, even in very difficult situations. For example, new global health tools have nearly eradicated Polio. The creation of new medicines makes eradication of other infectious diseases possible, too.

**Mr. Takano**

What is GHIT’s impact on global health?

**Mr. Gates**

Only three years has passed since its inception, but GHIT has strong leadership and moves very quickly. My colleagues and I at the Foundation see GHIT as a high-impact organization. Critical to GHIT’s overall impact is that Japanese pharmaceutical companies are very supportive and sincere in their engagement. GHIT targets neglected tropical diseases, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV—diseases in which Japanese scientists are also very interested. We can encourage them to accelerate their work by investing further in global health R&D.

As you know, the discovery of the anti-parasitic drug Ivermectin by Nobel laureate Dr. Satoshi Omura, Emeritus Professor at Kitasato University, has made an extraordinary impact on global health. This is a success story for Japan, as well as the inspiration for a future R&D pursuits in Japan. Scientists have creative ideas that are essential to eradicating infectious diseases. If they can secure the needed budget for product development, new medicines that utilize existing technology and insights become realities. I believe that more discoveries like Ivermectin are possible, as long as we continue to advance research and development.

**Mr. Takano**

What do you see as Japan’s role in Global Health today?

**Mr. Gates**

Our foundation looks globally for the best partners that help advance research and development in global health. There is no doubt that Japan is a very important partner. In collaboration with scientists globally, we hope to eradicate malaria. Indeed, I am pursuing the eradication of all
infectious diseases, or elimination to near zero. In order to achieve this goal, new products are essential.

Through GHIT, Japanese pharmaceutical companies have become deeply engaged in global health activities. This is a great achievement and illustrative of their leaders’ commitment to partnering for global health. Indeed, partnerships are indispensable to combatting infectious diseases.

To bring about further progress, we are all hopeful that in 2016 the Government of Japan will increase its support to the country’s game-changing global health commitments.