



Independent observer  
of the Global Fund

## The future of health work in Africa: what are the possibilities and who pays?

[SwitchPoint](#)—a production of [IntraHealth International](#)—is an innovative gathering that engages the smart, the curious, and the creative from all circles of humanitarian and global development work in discussions about shared concerns and joint solutions. The Global Fund works with SwitchPoint to mobilize young people and help them advocate for global health, including around where funding for health care comes from and how they can work with their own countries to increase domestic resources for health.

### Background

IntraHealth International is a global health non-profit organization that has worked in over 100 countries since 1979. It focuses on improving the performance of health workers and strengthening the systems in which they work so that everyone everywhere has the health care they need to thrive. It has grown into a staff of over 800 employees in 37 countries in Africa, the Americas, and Asia.

Because next-generation challenges in global health call for new and extraordinary partnerships, IntraHealth joins forces with governments, businesses, technologists, artists, activists, and more to cultivate local solutions with lasting results, as they explain on [their website](#). The aim of IntraHealth's programs is to generate long-term social and economic impact to keep communities around the world healthy, strong, and prosperous.

In 2011, IntraHealth began hosting the annual SwitchPoint event. Since then, SwitchPoint has grown into a community of diverse global thinkers merging ideas and sharing breakthroughs, tools, and lessons with a focus on humanitarian innovation, creativity, technology, and global health.

SwitchPoint was born out of the recognition that global health is connected to everything, and that without good health, none of our Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be met.

### Getting youth interested in global health

SwitchPoint started by bringing participants together for a three-day event in a music venue ? not a traditional setting for a global health meeting. The first day is SwitchPoint's Innovators' Forum, where speakers gather before the public event for in-depth conversations about what works, what doesn't, what kind of funding is needed and where it might come from.

The events are big; the first one had 70 speakers and an audience of 450. And their popularity doesn't stop there. SwitchPoint also takes its gatherings on the road, always bringing the arts together with diverse aspects of global health and giving technical, environmental, and corporate speakers opportunities to collaborate with artists, musicians, and puppeteers. The events are heavily interactive and cutting edge, and therefore, very appealing to young people. For example, in one year participants voted for their three favourite SDGs by throwing balls into basketball hoops set up on the stage. Other innovative ways to capture participants' attention include building pregnancy kits out of Lego blocks and holding Microlabs, SwitchPoint's interactive take on break-out sessions. These give participants a chance to work with presenters and create hands-on, practical solutions to real-world problems. The 2019 conference, for example, had 21 Microlabs over the course of two days, each limited to 30 participants, on topics such as fragile states, ecosystems, and immersive technology.

### SwitchPoint Virtual Exchanges

Heather LaGarde, SwitchPoint's producer and the senior strategic partnerships advisor at IntraHealth, says that initially they faced great challenges in reimagining SwitchPoint in the wake of COVID-19; but then they were inspired! In lieu of in-person global events, they launched a series of SwitchPoint Virtual Exchanges: online, creative, and highly interactive gatherings with the SwitchPoint style.

'Creative but serious' says LaGarde.

Through the virtual exchanges, participants interact with world leaders as well as young innovators from around the world who have, for example, invented something brilliant but still need access to the right connections or an investor. Since the event began in 2011, the SwitchPoint team have stayed in touch with all their young participants, many of whom have gone on to become SwitchPoint presenters.

### SwitchPoint Virtual Exchanges and the Global Fund

The Global Fund, initially cautious, soon realised that this was an innovative medium to send out messages about global health. The Global Fund, the Japanese Center for International Exchange and IntraHealth first partnered on SwitchPoint Shibuya in Tokyo, Japan, in 2019 with plans for a follow up collaboration in the US in 2020. The 2020 SwitchPoint in-person events were cancelled due to the pandemic but became six online events instead, of which several were in partnership with the Global Fund and were so successful that, LaGarde says, they will continue virtually even when face-to-face events can be resumed.

Virtual exchanges held with the Global Fund include:

Youth Voices: The Future We Want, held in September 2020, amplified the voices of young global health leaders, including members of [The Global Fund Youth Council](#), IntraHealth's Youth Ambassador team, young advocacy and policy leaders, and extraordinary artists such as CJ Suitt, Culture Mill, and acclaimed Kenyan musical artist Juliani. The Global Fund Executive Director Peter Sands, IntraHealth International

Chief Executive Officer Polly Dunford, and global specialists participated in this event focusing on critical global health needs even as countries were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women for Health: The Power of Female Health Workers in Nigeria in November 2020 with global development organization [DAI](#), brought the voices of rural women health workers together with global leaders, artists, students, and policy heads. It focused on the incredible impact female health workers can have and highlighted a successful eight-year endeavour by DAI to work with rural women to build strong, sustainable health systems. Addressing both the shortcomings and successes across communities facing multiple challenges, from health care access and internal displacement to trauma, shortages, and inequities, this SwitchPoint Virtual Exchange shone a spotlight on the resilience and ingenuity of local leadership in addressing critical global health issues.

COVID-19: Back to the Future in April 2021 focused on how the pandemic has changed our perspectives. What we thought we knew about pandemics, vaccines, economics, equity, affordable design, and global disaster preparedness has been turned upside down – a chilling illustration of the phrase “hindsight is 20-20.” Experts from around the world looked back at their own words and warnings from their past SwitchPoint talks. For example, a research scientist and magician who felt as though he had lost his magic until he started working on the vaccine; a screen-printing biology professor who transformed local mask-wearing and vaccine advocacy; and the Tokyo-based artist with perhaps the most challenging name in an era of social distancing (TOUCHY!). They were joined by renowned global health leaders, government officials, engineers, economists, fashion designers, and more to discuss how their creative minds coped with one of the greatest challenges of our time, and what they now see ahead for all of us on the horizon.

[The Future of Health Work in Africa: What are the Possibilities and Who Pays?](#) This creative and highly interactive virtual exchange and youth workshop series took place in October 2021 and was presented by the Global Fund’s Health Financing Department’s Advocacy Team; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and IntraHealth International. It was based on [The Future of Health Work in Africa: What Will It Look Like in 2040?](#), an in-depth study of potential future scenarios for health work in Africa. It featured global leaders, scenario actors, artists, and advocates, and took participants in a virtual time machine to 2040 where they met with people from the future including a newscaster, a grandmother, and cyberpunk tech reporters.

Participants learnt about predictions for global health in the future, exploring future trends and forecasting, scenario planning, health systems, and complex questions about financing and investment. The event focused on the importance of local leadership, hard choices, innovation, and domestic funding initiatives for sustainable health systems, and pandemic prevention and response in a rapidly changing world. And it featured the voices of youth leaders from across Africa who have participated in in-depth workshops on these issues and had many thoughts to impart about the future they want to share.

Future virtual events with young people on global health

Future League in partnership with the Global Fund featuring young leaders from across Africa advocating for global health and global health financing. They will be spending six months interviewing local leaders and sending in video reports and will produce their own SwitchPoint Exchange in 2022. Participants include young doctors, health economists, technologists, activists and even young Miss Universe Kenya, who is also a nurse and advocacy leader. It is supported by IntraHealth, the Global Fund and Africa’s One Campaign.

“How do we identify the young people we involve? Lots of research and network building,” LaGarde says. “We use local champions to identify local leaders. We review Global Fund advocates and young people from initiatives like the ONE Campaign in Africa and their highly interactive youth champion project. We talk with SwitchPoint alumni and cast a wide net to include people from all over the world in global health initiatives. SwitchPoint is challenging. It’s very innovative and it pushes people’s buttons, makes them laugh and cry. People join in sometimes with some su trepidation and leave inspired with new ideas, alternate and artistic ways of looking at hard subjects, and many connections.”

Further reading and information:

<https://event.switchpointideas.com/>

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