

# Interview: Karl Friberg Country President, South Africa & Sub Saharan Africa, AstraZeneca, South Africa

---

Interview: Karl Friberg Country President, South Africa & Sub Saharan Africa, AstraZeneca, South Africa

As a global biopharmaceutical company, we know that AstraZeneca can make a meaningful contribution to increase access to healthcare.

---

27.10.2015

Tags:

[pharma](#), [pharmaceuticals](#), [South Africa](#), [life sciences](#), [manufacturing](#), [investment](#), [R&D](#), [non-communicable diseases](#), [hypertension](#), [healthcare](#), [government relations](#), [oncology](#), [cardiovascular disease](#), [metabolic disease](#); [respiratory](#), [inflammation and autoimmunity](#).

---

*The country president for South Africa & Sub-Saharan Africa at AstraZeneca reveals why AstraZeneca sees Africa as the next frontier within the pharmaceutical industry, how their Research Trust looks to contribute to academic advancement on the continent, with a focus on non-communicable diseases, and how their Healthy Heart Africa program looks to increase awareness of the symptoms and risks of hypertension, offering education, screening, treatment and control.*

**You have been the country president for South Africa & Sub-Saharan Africa at AstraZeneca now for just over 2 years. What have been the main achievements and developments since you took over the position?**

In South Africa AstraZeneca is back to growth after some challenging years due to patent losses. Last year we grew by five percent, this year we expect to grow by eight to ten percent. In Africa, for the fourth consecutive year, we expect to grow somewhere between 40 to 50 percent. For AstraZeneca, South Africa is very much a European market. We follow the patent cliffs and experience similar shifts in the market as to what we experience in Europe or the US.

We have seen how many African governments are increasingly aware of the challenge of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Over the last few years, AstraZeneca has received a lot of interest in partnering with governments to tackle the burden of non-communicable diseases. Providing access to healthcare for all those who need it is a significant and complex challenge. As a global biopharmaceutical company, we know that AstraZeneca can make a meaningful contribution to increase access to healthcare. We are pursuing a range of different initiatives across patient populations to understand what works best and in what context.

---

**AstraZeneca's Global CEO Pascal Soriot has said that 2014 was a great year for AstraZeneca with the company recording \$26 billion in revenue. Emerging Markets delivered over two-thirds of the total revenue. What is the strategic importance of South Africa within the Emerging Markets?**

Our global leadership team has a long-term vision when it comes to Africa. From the initial stages we recognized that Africa would be the next frontier in the pharmaceutical industry. While some multinationals are pulling out from certain African countries, AstraZeneca has increased its investment on the continent. Our leadership team understands that it will take time to reap the full benefits of our commitment to Africa. At the moment we are laying the foundations, and eventually the platforms we have created will set us apart from our competitors.

**Guni Goolab, then AstraZeneca South Africa CEO, was telling us in 2012 how the company had decided to use its success in South Africa as the springboard to success in the African continent. Tell us about your strategy for African expansion?**

While we still run our African business from South Africa, we have changed our leadership structure to ensure that we have strong leadership in the respective African regions. We have a leadership team member sitting in Nairobi heading up East Africa; we have a leadership team member in Lagos covering West Africa; and a member in Mauritius heading up Southern Africa. We also have a separate general manager for South Africa, with myself as the overall regional business leader. We have localised our approach to Africa, creating four business units to ensure that we capture the opportunities present on the continent.

**You have said that one of the company's major strengths is its strong pipeline. What importance do you attach to the company's pipeline to business in Africa?**

AstraZeneca looks to conduct its pharma activities in Africa as we would do in Europe, the US or Asia. We take our educational, research and science commitments in Africa seriously. We will be launching our new diabetes drug, FORXIGA, in Angola, Mauritius and most likely Nigeria, before we launch it in South Africa. We continue to focus on delivering innovative medicines by accelerating our investment in Africa and intend to bring our full product pipeline to this region. AstraZeneca is fully committed to doing business in Africa. Within AstraZeneca our patents are equal the world over. Our focus, both globally and locally, is on three main therapy areas where we believe we can make the most meaningful difference to patients: oncology; cardiovascular and metabolic disease; and respiratory, inflammation and autoimmunity.

In South Africa we launched our breast cancer program Phakamisa in 2011. The program brings together different organizations to help raise breast cancer awareness, increase early diagnosis, and improve access to treatment and effective support networks in communities. The primary objective of Phakamisa is to address the needs of patients, health care professionals and the health care system in South Africa. Volunteers trained by us are out in the rural communities talking about breast cancer, cervical cancer, domestic violence and the need for education. To date we have reached almost one million individuals. It is a project I am proud to say we have created in South Africa for South Africa. Last year we took the decision to expand this initiative to cover prostate cancer.

---

## **What are some of your other focus areas in Africa?**

Another focus in Africa has been our AstraZeneca Research Trust. Aware of the need for funding that will contribute to academic advancement in South Africa, we have set up a not for profit trust. The money is used for research; with a broad focus on non-communicable diseases, generating significant data that is not currently available. We have now expanded our Research Trust beyond South Africa to the rest of the continent and expect the first publications to be released this year from Kenya and Nigeria. We are investing in the region of 1 million dollars on an annual basis on this initiative. We also have a strong R&D focus in South Africa. This commitment is evidenced by the approximately 30 AstraZeneca phase 2/3 studies running currently.

## **As part of your activities in Africa, what importance do you attach to partnering with the leading South African stakeholders?**

Collaboration is key for AstraZeneca. In November 2014 we launched our Healthy Heart Africa program. Healthy Heart Africa is designed in consultation and collaboration with non-governmental and community based organisations, international organisations, health experts and governments to support local health systems. It looks to increase awareness of the symptoms and risks of hypertension, offering education, screening, treatment and control. The program was initially launched in Kenya, and is now being rolled out to other African countries. Our commitment is to decrease the burden of high blood pressure, in African communities by 25 percent by the 2025, supporting the WHO's 25 by 25 global monitoring framework for preventing and controlling non-communicable diseases. Our ambition through this program is to reach 10 million Africans by 2025.

## **What is your five year vision for the future of South African Healthcare?**

I hope that South African healthcare will have found a way to ensure that new drugs receive faster regulatory approval. My desire is to see us find a way to embrace all South Africans, which will require public private partnerships. Today AstraZeneca is most active in the South African private sector, with very little activity in the public sector. The biggest challenge is to make new drugs available to the broader South African population.

## **What is it that motivates you every day?**

I am driven by science and knowing the difference our products can make on the African continent, in combatting the diseases that affect its people. I have had the privilege of working in this region for seven years, in both AstraZeneca's South African and Sub-Saharan business. With approximately 450 talented and motivated employees in our region, I am committed to furthering their careers and maximising the impact that AstraZeneca makes to our patients.

[Click here to read more articles and interviews from South Africa, and to download the latest free pharma report on the country.](#)

[See more interviews](#)

---