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Maybach foundation reaches out to Uganda's AIDS effort

During its short existence, the Maybach Family Foundation has been successfully setting up young people with globally prominent mentors. Now the group is taking on AIDS in Uganda with the help of two young doctors from the region and their mentor, a San Francisco researcher.

By Michelle Garcia

An Advocate.com exclusive posted May 25, 2007

The name Maybach may conjure thoughts of streamlined luxury vehicles, but the family behind the car is pushing a global effort to deliver AIDS treatment to those who may not otherwise receive it. Maybach Family Foundation creator, Ulrich Schmid-Maybach has partnered with Dr. David Bangsberg, a research faculty member at the University of California, San Francisco, to back two Ugandan HIV doctors who can help fight the spread of the disease. The announcement came in April at the Milken Institute Global Conference in Beverly Hills, Calif.



"It's not really linked with cars," Schmid-Maybach told *The Advocate*. "It is to help other people in the world. It's an economic question. Sick people can't work. It turns into a downward spiral. The children of sick people can't get an education because they're preoccupied with heading their family. By addressing the AIDS crisis, we're also addressing economic issues. We're looking to get individuals whose talents we can leverage over a broad spectrum in order to really make a difference."

Bangsberg heads the Family Treatment Fund based at the University of California, San Francisco, which has been researching and administering methods to distribute HIV drugs to Ugandans since 2000.

"Treatment in Uganda is so much more accessible now than it was 25 years ago," Bangsberg said. "So the global response has improved the lives of people; however, it's an emergent response. The long term, sustainable response relies on developing local leadership to develop and lead these programs, for decades to come."

Since its inception in October 2006, the Maybach Mentorship Program has matched mentors who have made strides in their fields with future leaders all over the globe. The program supports those who are especially disadvantaged by giving them access to grants and suitable opportunities and thus offering them the chance to become innovators themselves. In this case, Bangsberg will mentor two young doctors, Irene Andia-Biraro and Dennis Nansera, who have been combating the spread of AIDS in Uganda with limited resources, staffing, and financial backing.

The Family Treatment Fund has mushroomed into an organization with global recognition, working hand in hand with the Global Fund and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Through their outreach, Bangsberg's group came into contact with the doctors who, have dedicated



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their lives to helping those with HIV through treatment and medical care. Both Andia-Biraro and Nansera came to the U.S. to present, alongside Schmid-Maybach, the plans for the Maybach family foundation's involvement in Uganda, alongside the Family Treatment Fund.

Each doctor is just three years out of medical school. Andia-Biraro runs 18 HIV hospitals and five clinics, while Nansera has built an HIV care facility for more than 1,000 infants and children. Currently, he is planning an integrated HIV/ tuberculosis clinic with a capacity for 1,500 patients.

Together, they will work with their mentor, Bangsberg, to improve the distribution of AIDS drugs and to administer care for patients with help through the Maybach Family Foundation.

Nansera described his efforts with children and adolescents who have been touched by AIDS as "a real challenge. I work with a pediatric group, which cares for people who are up to 18 years old, and within that 18 years, there are many examples of children who succumb to HIV. Prevention is so hard on so many planes because with breast-feeding, mothers who are HIV positive are still breast-feeding their children, and transmitting [the virus] on to their children."

Teenagers witness so much early in their years that they become cynical and apathetic, losing hope for the future. "Usually, they feel that with HIV the next thing is death," Nansera said. "So they feel that if they're going to die, then why should they struggle and go to school and try to have a good, healthy life. And a number of them are heading their homes since their parents have died from AIDS."

Andia-Biraro said that a girl born in Uganda today has an estimated life span of about 40 years, and a 30 percent risk of contracting HIV, which can knock 10 years off her life. Women have further disadvantages in Uganda economically because they are more likely to drop out of school to care for family members who are infected.

"Most of the women in Uganda are less fortunate than me," she said. "They have an apparent economic disadvantage in relation to men. We must help work toward economic independence of women. I know that this freedom will give them the confidence to make better choices, rear a healthy family, and stop the spread of HIV and AIDS."

While young doctors in this region often leave for greener pastures, Nansera and Andia-Biraro aim to initiate infrastructure reform in their AIDS-ravaged homeland and to encourage the next generation of physicians to stay and help. Schmid-Maybach emphasizes his foundation is out to make an enduring impression.

"Our mission is more than providing these young people with money," he said. "It is to provide them with a level of guidance, training, and experience that will propel them to have a substantial and long-term impact."

Michelle Garcia is The Advocate's editorial assistant.

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