



Travel Report and Five Key Themes from the Study Trip

The Secretariat of the Danish Alliance for Global Health, in partnership with IAVI and the Danish AIDS Foundation, organized a study trip to Cape Town, South Africa, from 23-26 November 2025 for three Danish and three Swedish parliamentarians representing the foreign affairs and health committees.

The study trip focused on two interconnected pillars of the global health ecosystem. On one hand, by showcasing some of the Research and Development (R&D) efforts to develop new tools to address some of South Africa's most urgent health challenges, particularly HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

In parallel, the trip showcased some powerful examples of how multilateral funding mechanisms such as the Global Fund play a critical role ensuring access to the tools we already have - from antiretroviral HIV drugs to treat HIV, to new X-ray machines to improve TB diagnosis.

South Africa carries the world's largest HIV burden, with around 8 million people living with HIV and more than 50,000 deaths each year (630,000 globally). TB remains similarly devastating, causing over 50,000 deaths annually in South Africa (1.3 million worldwide). These health challenges are compounded by stark socio-economic inequalities: South Africa has the highest Gini coefficient in the world and, despite significant economic strength relative to the region, continues to grapple with deep inequality and the enduring structural legacies of apartheid that shape health outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the study trip highlighted the pivotal role of the Nordic countries in both expanding access to existing health tools and sustaining long-term investment in innovation. Through support to multilaterals such as [The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) and [UNFPA](#), the Nordics help deliver life-saving services today, while continued backing of locally anchored research partnerships - including [IAVI](#) and [Population Council](#), and EU-Africa research funding mechanisms like the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership ([EDCTP](#)) - is essential to developing the next generation of solutions.

Five Key Themes from the Study Trip

1. [Global health R&D partnerships and multilateral funding are complementary pillars of the global health ecosystem](#)
2. [Integrating community and youth engagement is indispensable for sustainable impact](#)
3. [Nordic countries can play a unique role advancing global health R&D at a time where other donors are scaling back](#)
4. [The consequences of US funding cuts are devastating](#)
5. [Multilateral funding works and Nordic collaboration amplifies its impact](#)



1. Global health R&D partnerships and multilateral funding are complementary pillars of the global health ecosystem

The study trip clearly demonstrated that long-term investment in global health R&D and strong multilateral funding mechanisms are mutually reinforcing. Breakthroughs in HIV and TB prevention - including vaccines and long-acting prevention tools such as vaginal rings - depend on sustained, predictable support to research partnerships operating in high-burden settings. South Africa illustrates the value of this approach: locally anchored and equitable research collaborations deliver high returns on investment by combining world-leading scientific expertise with real-world implementation, while simultaneously building durable research infrastructure and skilled health workforces. The ability of HIV vaccine research networks to rapidly contribute to COVID-19 vaccine development provides clear evidence of this spill-over effect.

At the same time, Nordic-supported multilaterals such as the Global Fund play a decisive role in translating scientific progress into population-level impact. By financing access to proven interventions - including antiretroviral therapy and modern TB diagnostics - these mechanisms save lives today and strengthen health systems. They will also be essential to ensure rapid, equitable delivery of future innovations, such as new TB vaccines, once available. Together, R&D partnerships and multilateral funding maximize health impact per invested DKK or SEK and represent one of the most cost-effective and strategically sound global health investments available to Nordic countries.

2. Integrating community and youth engagement is indispensable for sustainable impact

The study trip showed that health services and health R&D deliver lasting results only when built on trust, inclusion and genuine community partnership. Visits to Masiphumelele, Mbekweni (Be Part) and Gugulethu highlighted that this is especially critical for young people - particularly adolescent girls and young women - who face the highest HIV incidence rates in South Africa and are both key users of care and the future health workforce.

Local partners such as the [Desmond Tutu Health Foundation](#), [Masiphumelele Research Site](#), [Be Part Yoluntu Centre](#) and [Sonke Gender Justice](#) demonstrated that community advisory boards, community health workers and long-term engagement are core to effective and ethical programmes. Integrated models linking youth activities with prevention, treatment and research increase uptake, trust and impact.

3. Nordic countries can play a unique role advancing global health R&D at a time where other donors are scaling back

The Nordics have longstanding partnerships with many African countries, including South Africa, and remain key actors in global health support and diplomacy. As several major donors - not least the United States, previously the world's largest public donor - scale back their official development assistance, there is both an urgent need and an opportunity for the Nordic countries to step up. The Nordic countries are, for example, key participants in the [EDCTP](#), a unique global health R&D funding model for the European Union that brings together EU and African countries to fund clinical trials and capacity development targeting



poverty-related infectious diseases in high-burden settings, where research is most needed and where it helps building resilient African research ecosystems.

At the same time, despite a long tradition of supporting locally anchored research organizations, such as product development partnerships like [Population Council](#) and [IAVI](#), Nordic funding is now being reduced or redirected, although these organizations work squarely within the priorities outlined in Nordic foreign and development cooperation strategies. Cutting support now is risky: it threatens hard-won progress in for example HIV, TB, SRHR research and vaccine development and roll-out. Progress has contributed to many countries' improvement in life expectancy, including South Africa's; rising from around 52 years in 2005 (at the peak of the HIV epidemic) to around 66 years in 2025. The dual epidemics of HIV and TB continue to be a major health and development challenge in South Africa and the African continent at large. In the longer run, research partnerships for the development of new vaccines and other tools are key to change the course of these epidemics. These gains are exactly the kind of global results that decades of consistent Nordic official development assistance (ODA) - anchored in the United Nations target of allocating at least 0.7% of GNI to ODA - have helped make possible.

4. Local partners are concerned about the consequences of US funding cuts

Throughout the study trip, local partners repeatedly raised concerns about the growing impact of recent funding cuts from the United States and the uncertainty surrounding future global health investments. As the US has historically been the world's largest public donor of development assistance, in absolute terms, and especially for health, the scale-back is felt hard across Africa. Several other historically large public donors are also reducing or redirecting ODA funding, creating a widening gap at a moment of high global need.

Two recent studies illustrate the gravity of the situation. [Researchers in a study in The Lancet](#) estimate that current funding cuts could result in more than 14 million additional deaths between now and 2030 if not offset by other donors. [Researchers in another study](#) projects that a complete cessation of US funding - without replacement - would lead to dramatic increases from 2025 to 2030, including:

- 4.1 million additional AIDS-related deaths across 55 countries
- 606,900 additional TB deaths across 79 countries
- 40-55 million additional unplanned pregnancies and 12-16 million unsafe abortions
- 2.5 million additional child deaths from non-HIV, non-TB causes.

As major donors step back, the Nordic countries have a unique opportunity to step in and help stabilize global health gains. Acting now would not only prevent devastating reversals in global health progress; it would also strengthen the Nordic voice and influence in shaping a more resilient global health architecture.

5. Multilateral funding works and Nordic collaboration amplifies its impact

The broad reach of multilateral partnerships and organizations such as [the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria](#) and [UNFPA](#) enables the Nordic countries to support vulnerable populations in hard-to-reach settings and least-developed countries where we do not have



bilateral agreements or embassy presence. The Global Fund is the world's largest global health financing partnership, bringing together public and private partners to fund national and local health programs. It is among the most cost-effective mechanisms in global health, generating large returns in lives saved, economic gains, and stronger health-system resilience. The Nordics remain among the most stable and largest donors of the Global Fund, with Sweden being the 8th largest and Denmark the 14th largest to date. As the Global Fund is entering its eighth replenishment round (covering 2026-2028), Denmark has pledged DKK 375 million to the Fund covering the three years, whereas Sweden (at the time of writing) is yet to pledge.

UNFPA is the UN's sexual and reproductive health agency, working, among other things, to ensure access to family planning, safe births, services for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and care and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The Nordic countries are staunch supporters of UNFPA and its mission, especially as the agency has faced global pushbacks in recent years.

Nordic collaboration within these multilateral organizations significantly strengthens our collective influence. By speaking with a unified Nordic voice, we can leverage shared strengths - scientific excellence, long-standing development cooperation, and a principled commitment to human rights - to shape global health agendas, advance equitable policies and deliver concrete results. Working multilaterally and regionally allows the Nordics to remain visible, effective and value-driven actors in global health, even in contexts where direct engagement is not possible.

Included appendixes:

1. [Key takeaways from site visits](#)
2. [Background on the co-organizers](#)
3. [Additional resources on organizations and programs visited](#)



Appendix 1: Key Takeaways from Site Visits

MONDAY

Groote Schuur Hospital, University of Cape Town & Desmond Tutu Health Foundation

Linda-Gail Bekker, CEO of the Foundation and an internationally renowned HIV researcher, highlighted South Africa's world-class capacity in HIV and TB research, its strong community engagement, and deep international partnerships, including with IAVI. The discussion underscored the importance of long-term, predictable funding and the clear potential for strengthened Nordic–South African collaboration.

Masiphumelele Research Site

Located in a densely populated community with high HIV and TB prevalence, the visit to Masiphumelele demonstrated how R&D delivers impact only when built on trust and strong community partnerships. Youth engagement and locally driven research models were shown to be essential for ethical, effective HIV and TB interventions.

TUESDAY

Be Part Yoluntu Centre

At Be Part, we heard about the [MTBVAC TB vaccine trial](#) and how screening, follow-up and community engagement are integrated. The site demonstrated strong research capacity in a high burden setting, the complexity and costs of these trials, and the importance of partnerships to advance the development of vaccines and prevention tools with the highest impact potential, such as [new TB vaccines](#).

Western Cape Department of Health & TC Newman Clinic

[The Western Cape](#) is one of South Africa's best-performing provinces on health outcomes, driven by integrated HIV and TB services and a strong innovative agenda. At TC Newman Clinic, we heard about the mobile digital chest X-ray unit funded by the Global Fund, which enables early TB case detection in communities. The visit showed how multilateral funding translates directly into lives saved and strengthened health systems - and why predictable replenishment and Nordic pledges are essential.

Novo Nordisk South Africa

[Novo Nordisk South Africa](#) presented its expanding clinical trial portfolio across Africa and investments in training and capacity building. The company also highlighted its local production of human insulin in South Africa, strengthening medicine security and access.

WEDNESDAY

UNFPA, Sonke Gender Justice, South African Medical Research Council & Tiko

Partners presented an Outcomes-Based Financing model for SRHR and HIV designed to attract blended finance and ensure sustainability as donor priorities shift. The session underscored



how community activities - such as local football events - can engage men on issues like HIV, STIs, TB, gender-based violence and family planning.

Ambassador Briefing - Geopolitical and Nordic Context

The Danish Ambassador to South Africa, Karin Poulsen, provided political context on South Africa and the region, including highlights from the recent EU-AU Summit in Angola and the G20 Summit in South Africa. The discussion underlined the long-standing Nordic–South African relationship and the renewed commitment to strengthening Nordic-African cooperation, highlighted at the Africa-Nordic Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe.



Appendix 2: Background on the co-organizers

IAVI

IAVI is a global nonprofit focused on the R&D of vaccines and antibodies for HIV, TB, and emerging infectious diseases that can be affordable and accessible to all in need. IAVI partners with academia, biotechnological companies, research groups and clinical research organizations. For more than 20 years, IAVI has worked with African and South African research groups, contributing to build up sustainable research capacities for HIV, TB and other poverty-related infectious diseases research in most affected countries, and to build trust and engagement with the local communities

IAVI has led the search for an HIV vaccine since 1996, and today is amongst the top organizations leading the way towards a [new generation of HIV vaccines](#). For the first time in more than 100 years, new TB vaccines are on the horizon, and IAVI is leading the clinical development in Africa, including in South Africa. [Recent studies](#) sponsored by the World Health Organization have shown that future vaccines would be cost-effective, preventing up to 76 million new TB cases and 8.5 million deaths, and accruing an economic return of seven dollars per dollar invested.

The Danish AIDS Foundation

AIDS-Fondet (the Danish AIDS Foundation) is a Danish NGO working for sexual health for all and a world without AIDS. Founded in 1985, AIDS-Fondet runs Checkpoint clinics across four major cities in Denmark, providing comprehensive sexual health services for young people aged 15-29 and LGBT+ people of all ages. Services include STIs and HIV counselling and testing, information on and referral for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), as well as specialized counselling for vulnerable groups. AIDS-Fondet also works with local partners in Uganda, Malawi, Ethiopia and Ukraine to increase access to HIV services and promote human rights for key populations (sex workers, LGBT+ people and people who use drugs) in addition to working with global and national partners to ensure a comprehensive and rights-based global HIV and AIDS response.

Danish Alliance for Global Health

[The Danish Alliance for Global Health](#) is a cross-sectoral and politically independent platform bringing together 24 member organizations (as of December 2025) from civil society, academia and research, the private sector, foundations and multilateral organizations. Founded in June 2024, the Alliance has a clear and ambitious vision: to enable long and healthy lives for everyone, everywhere, by strengthening and advocating for Denmark's engagement and leadership in global health. The Alliance also sees strong potential for deeper Nordic cooperation and joint leadership on global health and works actively with Nordic partners across sectors to help realize this potential.

Please contact **Oscar Milsted Karstad** (Danish Alliance for Global Health) at oscar@globalsundhed.org if you have any questions or would like further information about the study trip or the contents of this travel report.



Appendix 3: Additional resources on programs and organizations visited

2025 Global Tuberculosis and AIDS Reports

- [UNAIDS global AIDS update 2025 | UNAIDS](#)
- [Global Tuberculosis Report 2025 - World Health Organization](#)

The European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP)

The EDCTP was mentioned in several instances during the study trip. The EDCTP is a funding mechanism organized as a multilateral partnership between the EU, some EU Member States (both Sweden and Denmark), African countries and other partners, focused on funding clinical trials and research capacity building, such as by research-career development grants, for poverty-related infectious diseases.

Since its launch in 2003, EDCTP has co-funded more than 600 projects with a total budget exceeding €2 billion. The third iteration of the programme, EDCTP3, is in high demand. In 2025, it received applications totaling €1.57 billion, while the budget was only €240 million. EDCTP3 runs from 2021 to 2031 as a joint undertaking under Horizon Europe, although Horizon Europe financial commitments only cover 2021–2027.

This vision and mission of EDCTP aligns closely with the priorities set out in both the Danish Africa Strategy and the Danish development cooperation strategy, as well as with the global health priorities of Sweden and the wider Nordic region. Strong Danish, Swedish and Nordic engagement in EDCTP therefore responds directly to what both European and African partners are calling for: deeper cooperation on research, innovation and health security, anchored in equitable partnerships.

Statens Serum Institute

During the study trip, [Statens Serum Institute](#) (SSI) was highlighted for its internationally recognized TB research and its ongoing work in South Africa (read more [here](#)). The world's only licensed TB vaccine, BCG, was invented in 1921 by Albert Calmette and Camille Guérin. BCG protects children against the most severe forms of TB but offers limited protection against pulmonary TB in adolescents and adults - which is why new vaccines such as MTBVAC and M72 are under development.

SSI has played a significant role in the global BCG legacy. From the 1920s onward, SSI contributed to TB diagnostics, vaccine efforts, and later developed the BCG Danish strain, one of the most widely used BCG strains worldwide. For decades, SSI supplied BCG to many countries and supported global mass-vaccination campaigns. Today, SSI continues to advance next-generation TB vaccine research and improved diagnostics, making it a key historical and modern actor in global TB prevention.