

[Dr. Sanjay Advani, Small Medium Enterprises Today - March 2012 Pull out, Published Article](#)



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Beta Healthcare: A Trusted name in healthcare

For most Kenyans, the mention of the name Beta Healthcare would not easily register in their minds. But mention medicines like Action, Maramoja and Good Morning and everybody easily recognizes them. This is due to the fact that for most people, these have been the non-prescription drugs they have for years relied upon for fast relief whenever one has a headache or a cough. This is because these tablets have always been affordable. Yet while nearly all Kenyans know about these drugs, few know they are manufactures by beta Healthcare, a company that has been around for close to half a century. "We have been around for 48 years and our products are trusted in the market," says Dr. Sanjay Advani, Beta Healthcare Chief Executive.

The story of Beta Healthcare, which is undoubtedly a leading over the counter (OTC) pharmaceutical company in the country, is one of steady growth through guaranteed quality, proven efficacy, value for money, new innovations in line with changing lifestyles and continuous research and development in new technologies to meet customer requirements. The company's values are speed, which is reaching its customers fast to cater for their health needs; integrity, that is ensuring that its products are safe for consumers; affordability that is providing affordable quality products for consumers and accessibility, being where its consumers are. When the company was established 48 years ago, it used to have only two products Maramoja and Action. Today the company has 50 products in its basket and plans are in the pipeline to launch more – particularly lifestyle related products. "Our aim is to launch healthy living range of products due to the changing lifestyles," states Dr. Advani. He adds that this year, the company plans to launch at least 13 new products.

It is not hard to see why the company is betting on herbal products, which it has dubbed Health Living products, as the next frontier in its growth trajectory. In recent years, lifestyles have been changing as the country develops. For instance, years gone-by fast foods were a reserve of a few. But today they have become a norm. Besides, as the economy grows and the middle class expand, lifestyles like excessive consumption of beer and eating of nyama choma and the likes is on the increase. The new phenomenon is exposing people to diseases that were unheard of in the past. This is why Beta Healthcare is introducing healthy Living products to help people deal with the changing lifestyles. "Protection is always better than cure," observes Dr. Advani, adding that the company wants to help people live a healthy life instead of spending millions of shillings seeking treatment when a problem occurs. The company has already introduced a product for the liver to ensure it functions when an individual eats meat with beer. "The liver is the largest organ in the body and it's forced to work more when someone eats meat and drinks beer, something that is a common habit in Kenya today," explains Dr. Advani who started his career as medical representative in India. He adds that Beta Healthcare also has a product for increasing the memory and even slimming.

Apart from lifestyle products, Beta Healthcare has also ventured into Infant Milk Formula. The company has a wide range of Infant Milk Formula including Infacare 1, Infacare 2 and Infacare 3.

Beta Healthcare is also investing in increasing the range of herbal products. According to Dr. Advani, there are many herbalists in Kenya but some of their ingredients do not work well besides the fact that the medicines are usually not packaged well. Yet as chronic diseases increase, the belief in herbal medicines is on the rise mainly because prescription drugs are extremely expensive and out of reach for majority of Kenyans. This is why Beta Healthcare has introduced a line of accessible and affordable herbal products that can help people manage chronic diseases. The products, according to Dr. Advani, have been received well in the market. "Kenyans have embraced our herbal products for chronic problems," he reckons.

Though Beta Healthcare has achieved major milestones over the years, a new impetus for faster growth was achieved in 2008. In May 2008 Aspen Pharmaceuticals acquired 60 per cent of the share capital of Shelys Africa Limited, which has operations in East and Central Africa. Both Beta Healthcare in Kenya that deals in OTC products and FMCG products and Shelys pharmaceuticals, that is a leader in script market operate under the umbrella of Shelys Africa. The acquisition by Aspen catapulted the company to one of the biggest in Africa. In 2009, the company acquired Colgate Palmolive's manufacturing plant in Nairobi's industrial area after Colgate closed its manufacturing operations in Kenya. The relocation to the new premises was strategic as it enabled Beta Healthcare to diversify its manufacturing capabilities as it targets to venture into new markets in Africa. The plant has also enabled the company to expand on its research and development (R&D) activities and plans are underway to transfer the R&D centre from Tanzania to Kenya. "We will be the only company with an R&D centre in Kenya," states Dr. Advani. This will be no mean achievement in an industry with 35 companies.

According to Dr. Advani, although Beta Healthcare has achieved significant growth over the years, it continues to face numerous challenges. Just like other manufacturers, the company continues to feel the pain of high energy costs and poor infrastructure. Energy costs, in particular, have been severe and have even made several multinationals to relocate their operations to other parts of Africa. "Top companies have relocated and Kenya is becoming a trading nation," he observes. For Beta Healthcare, another big challenge is the issue of currency fluctuation. The company, which imports 99 per cent of its raw material, suffers greatly whenever the Kenyan shilling weakens against major world currencies like it happened last year when the shilling depreciated to an all time low of Ksh.107 against the American dollar. Yet

although the fall of the shilling dealt a major blow to the company, it was the only company that did not increase the prices of its products. This is one of the reasons that Beta Healthcare products continue to perform well in the market and the company continues to record unprecedented growth.