

Africa needs to grow its pharmaceutical market

Africa urgently needs to develop its pharmaceutical sector to reduce its dependence on imported drugs and medical products.



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The continent bears a disproportionate burden of disease with more than 70% of the world's HIV/Aids cases and 90% of deaths due to malaria, and its total pharmaceutical spend in 2012 was estimated at \$18bn, projected to reach \$45bn by 2020. Therefore its essential to grow the local pharmaceutical market, says Soteri Gatera, chief of the industrialisation and infrastructure section at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Non-communicable diseases

“Non-communicable diseases are also becoming increasingly prominent across the continent given the demographic changes that are taking place,” he told participants in the meeting hosted by the ECA, the African Union Commission and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (Unido).

Non-communicable diseases are predicted to overtake infectious diseases as the leading causes of death in Africa by 2030. The situation is worsened by the continent's significant challenges in accessing high-quality pharmaceuticals, exacerbating a continued high burden of disease.

The availability of essential drugs in the public sector across the continent has been reported to be less than 60%. The major factor being that Africa is hugely dependent on imported pharmaceutical and medical products.

It is estimated that more than 80% of ARVs used on the continent are imported from outside the continent with 70% of the pharmaceutical and medical products market being served by foreign imports.

“An international standard, commercially viable pharmaceutical industry in Africa can contribute to improved access to effective, safe and affordable essential medicines and economic development,” Gatera says.

From the health perspective, he adds, a key potential benefit is to develop a source of quality assured medicines across products including those for the pandemic diseases (HIV, TB and malaria) as well as the broader range of essential medicines.

Through proximity of production, resource-constrained regulators can properly oversee the manufacturing of products produced in the region compared to the level of scrutiny that is possible for distant suppliers, he says.

The immense need for drugs presents a potential market opportunity for pharmaceutical companies on the continent.

For example, he said, the current number of people on ARV treatment on the continent represents a market opportunity of over \$1bn. This market will more than treble over the next decade as more people are placed on ARV treatment and other uses of ARVs are expanded.

Socio-economic transformation

In addition to providing a secure source of medicines and a potentially large market, local production of pharmaceuticals also:

- advance industrial development,
- move the continent towards sustainability of the health sector response,
- reduce external dependency,
- facilitate stronger regulatory oversight to curtail counterfeit products,
- enable production of drugs for diseases that primarily affect Africa,
- improve the trade balance,
- create jobs
- and could serve as a catalyst to developing a broader manufacturing and knowledge-based economy.

There are a number of measures taken by the African Union Commission and its partners to promote the manufacture of medicines in Africa in line with the accelerated industrialisation initiative for the continent's socio-economic transformation.

“The untapped opportunities lend themselves to a wide array of partnerships for the promotion of inclusive and sustainable industrial development. The partnerships would create higher-skilled jobs, build equitable societies and safeguard the environment, while sustaining economic growth,” he says.

The workshop sought to validate an ECA report titled; *Review of Policies and Strategies for the Pharmaceutical Production Sector in Africa: Policy coherence, best practices and future prospective* in which policies and strategies for the pharmaceutical sector in Africa are reviewed with a view to assess the level of policy coherence, capturing best practices and painting future prospects for the sector.

The report provides an overview of the status of pharmaceutical production in Africa and identifies levels and quality of production on the continent.

It is hoped, the final knowledge product will influence African governments to take appropriate actions that will transform the

sector from being a coffer-drainer to a substantive contributor to Africa's GDP, says Gatera.

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