

Africa's efforts to build a resilient and self-reliant pharmaceutical industry for the continent advanced significantly on Monday as the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation and the Rwandan Government signed the host country agreement paving way for the Foundation's operationalisation.

The Foundation also signed a memorandum of understanding with the European Investment Bank to further strengthen cooperation.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) Group's Board of Directors approved the setting up of the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation as an independent body in June 2022.

The statement by the bank said the Foundation's work—which has significant technical and financial support globally and within Africa—will be central to Africa's pharmaceutical sector. It is the first of its kind to foster collaboration between the public and private sectors in Africa, North America, Europe and the rest of the developing world.

The Rwandan government has played a pivotal role in anchoring the Foundation and granting it the status of an international agency, it said.

At the host country agreement signing ceremony in Kigali, Rwanda's Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Dr Vincent Biruta, said it was important to close the vaccine equity gap between African countries and the world's developed nations. "To close the gap, we must continue investing in pharmaceutical production in Africa and other developing countries," Biruta said. He added: "Technology and knowledge transfer are central. The new African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation will help Africa gain rapid access to the latest pharmaceutical breakthroughs."

Biruta signed the host country agreement for the Rwandan government, while Professor Padmashree Gehl Sampath, interim Chief Executive Officer of the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation, signed for the Foundation.

Competitive pharmaceutical industry

African Development Bank Group President Dr Akinwumi Adesina said the establishment of the Foundation was a pledge that Africa will have what it needs to build its own health defence system, which must include a thriving African

pharmaceutical industry, and a quality healthcare infrastructure.

“Technology is the main transformative tool that will enable the development of a competitive pharmaceutical industry that Africa will need to secure the health and wellbeing of all her people,” Adesina stressed. He added: “The African Development Bank is committed to investing up to \$3 billion over the next decade in the development of the pharmaceutical industry as part of our efforts to industrialise Africa and lessen the continent’s reliance on imports.”

Gehl Sampath, said: “Building Africa’s pharmaceutical sector to serve the continent is an idea whose time has come. The African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation has a clear agenda and vision and is ready to hit the ground running in January 2024. It is important that we now increase the maturity of Africa’s pharmaceutical industry by supporting the development of local production and innovation capabilities. This will require strong partnerships between local and international pharmaceutical companies and research institutions.”

Germany has been a great supporter of the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation, in keeping with its strong commitment to local production in the region. Dr Bärbel Kofler, Parliamentary State Secretary in Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and African Development Bank Group Governor, said: “For Germany it is a great privilege to serve on the Board of Directors of this important institution. My government is committed to supporting the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation through a strong partnership based on shared values and aspirations for a healthier and safer Africa.”

Need to mobilize new financing instruments

Global partners—including the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization—have applauded the creation of the Foundation. World Health Organization Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: “The World Health Organization is proud to support the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation and its mission to increase access to safe and effective medicines for Africa. Health is not a privilege. It’s a human right, which is integral to development and sustainability.”

World Trade Organization Director General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said: “I leave you with a firm pledge of our support for the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation, which has enormous potential to transform the pharmaceutical industry

in Africa and contribute to health equity across the continent. Let's work together to make the Foundation an inspiring African success story."

Scaling up Africa's pharmaceutical innovation

The Foundation's work has received a major boost with a memorandum of understanding signed between the Foundation and the European Investment Bank. The memorandum of understanding between the two organisations will mobilise new financing instruments to overcome market failures and mobilise pharmaceutical investments across Africa. Both organisations will use their convening power to crowd in more multilateral public and private financing into pharmaceutical production in Africa.

The European Investment Bank will be a partner in the Foundation's regional biosimilars program for the production and innovation of relevant biosimilars in Africa and to facilitate the creation of common active pharmaceutical ingredients parks in any chosen specific sub-region of Africa.

Gelsomina Vigliotti, Vice President at the European Investment Bank, said: "The European Investment Bank is committed to working with our partners to strengthen public health and health innovation across Africa, and around the world. We are pleased to support the visionary African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation. Strengthening access to finance is essential to scale up pharmaceutical investment and innovation across Africa."