

Africa should produce its first health-tech unicorn within the next five years, Jean-Philbert Nsengimana, chairman of the Africa HealthTech Summit said on Wednesday, challenging innovators and investors to build companies capable of expanding across the continent.

Nsengimana made the call at the opening of the fifth Africa HealthTech Summit (AHTS5) in Kigali, arguing that Africa's growing health-technology sector needs to move from individual projects to businesses capable of operating at scale.

"We want to see an African health-tech unicorn in the next five years," Nsengimana told delegates.

The summit is bringing together health officials, entrepreneurs, investors, technology companies and development partners, with financing for African health-tech startups among the issues under discussion.

Nsengimana said Africa had no shortage of health-tech ideas, but many projects had struggled to move beyond the pilot stage.

"Africa has therefore become a graveyard for health-tech pilots," he said.

He said the sector needed greater accountability and stronger follow-up on projects that had already demonstrated potential.

"What we want to see over the next five years is accountability," Nsengimana said.

Nsengimana said 75 implementation opportunities and resolutions from the previous summit were being followed up individually with partners.

He called for stronger cooperation between governments, innovators and investors, saying successful health technologies need a path into national health systems and access to markets across the continent.



Gates Foundation deputy director for health in Africa Boniface Njenga said governments should have ownership of the digital systems being developed in their countries.

"This is not about partnership, it's about ownership," Njenga said. "It's about

partnership and ownership by the governments.”

Njenga said technology companies should build systems that can work within national health structures rather than create disconnected initiatives.

Africa CDC Director-General Dr Jean Kaseya said African countries also needed to create an environment in which health technology could grow while protecting patients and strengthening health systems.

He called for stronger African standards around data, artificial intelligence governance, privacy and cybersecurity.

Nsengimana said the continent’s large and growing healthcare needs presented an opportunity for African technology companies to develop solutions that could serve several countries rather than remain confined to individual pilot programmes.

The chairman said the ambition was not simply to produce more digital health projects, but to build African companies capable of turning those solutions into sustainable businesses and expanding them across the continent.