

Bio Usawa and the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) have teamed up to establish Rwanda's first manufacturing plant for affordable treatments targeting serious eye diseases, such as diabetic macular edema.

Diabetic macular edema, a leading cause of vision loss, occurs when fluid leaks from damaged blood vessels in the eye, causing swelling in the central part responsible for sharp vision. It affects around 7–10% of people with diabetes, often leading to permanent blindness if untreated.

Although monoclonal antibody (mAb) biosimilars for treating diabetic macular edema are widely available in high-income countries, their accessibility in Africa is limited. This new facility will change that, offering affordable, high-quality treatments made locally. The first biosimilar from the plant is expected to be produced within 18–24 months.

“Our goal is clear: to build biomanufacturing capacity across Africa, by Africans and for Africans,” said Menghis Bairu, CEO of Bio Usawa. “With this partnership, we aim to make treatments for serious eye diseases affordable and accessible. This aligns with Rwanda's vision of becoming a healthcare hub in East Africa.”

Bairu also expressed gratitude to the Government of Rwanda for its commitment to improving healthcare. “Together, we look forward to transforming healthcare access across the continent and bringing affordable biologics closer to home,” he added.

Francis Gatare, CEO of RDB emphasized the significance of the partnership, calling it a major milestone for Rwanda's healthcare sector. “This collaboration marks the launch of Rwanda's first monoclonal antibody-based biosimilar facility. It will address key healthcare challenges and improve access to life-saving treatments like those for diabetic macular edema. This effort reflects Rwanda's ongoing commitment to healthcare innovation and sustainable solutions for Africa.”

This collaboration represents a major step toward expanding healthcare capacity and ensuring better access to essential treatments across the continent.