

The Rwandan Minister of State in the Ministry of Health, Dr Yvan Butera has hailed the assistance by the African development bank in supporting the establishment of first ever African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation.

The senior Rwandan official was addressing the forum, titled “*Technology Access for Pharmaceutical Manufacturing: The African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation*” and which was held on the sidelines of the [second Annual International Conference on Public Health in Africa \(CPHIA 2022\)](#).

As a continent, Africa is heavily reliant on vaccine imports, accounting for 99% of routine vaccines. The global pandemic has raised a new question about the necessity of the continent having its own vaccine manufacturing capacity.

The continent looks to create a vision for manufacturing vaccines while protecting public health and security. Agreed was a roadmap to achieve 60% of the continent’s vaccine development and manufacturing ecosystem by 2040.

In a move to achieve this target, experts and decision makers gathered in Kigali on 14 December, 2022 have called for more efforts to address the gaps in the production of critical drugs on the Africa stressing that technology capacity is still crucial for the continent to develop its own vaccine and medicines.

During the forum, experts discussed cutting-edge digital technologies that will help Africa to bypass the infrastructural gaps affecting its pharmaceutical value chain as a move improve health outcomes on the continent favourably.

[The new African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation \(APTF\)](#) that was unveiled on the sidelines of the forum will focus mainly on innovative approaches incorporating partnerships, intellectual property, and domestic capacity-building that promotes sustainable pharmaceutical manufacturing in Africa.

The Foundation represents a significant step towards improving the health prospects of a continent that is burdened by disease but with a minimal capacity to produce its own medicines and vaccines. According to Bank data, Africa imports more than 70% of the medications it needs, at a cost of up to \$14 billion annually.

### ***Filling gaps in the production of critical drugs***

In June this year, [the African Development Bank’s Board of Directors](#) approved the establishment of the APTF to boost the continent’s access to technology in

manufacturing medicines, vaccines and other pharmaceutical products.

According to Mr Solomon Quaynor, the Vice-President for Private Sector, Infrastructure and Industrialization at the bank, the new foundation is a groundbreaking institution that will significantly enhance Africa's access to technologies that underpin the manufacture of medicines.



Mr Solomon Quaynor, Vice-President for Private Sector, Infrastructure and Industrialization at the African Development Bank (AfDB) addressing the APTF forum in Kigali

“The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of global health systems and the gaps in the production of critical drugs on the continent,” the senior bank official said.

Latest estimates by the bank show that although it is relatively small in global terms (worth US \$23.1 billion in 2011, or less than 2% of the global market), Africa's pharmaceutical industry is the fastest growing in the world.

The experts and policymakers, who are drawn from different parts across the globe were unanimous in stating that key to these innovations will be on innovative approaches incorporating partnerships, intellectual property, and domestic capacity-building that promotes sustainable pharmaceutical manufacturing in

Africa.

### ***Technology transfer***

[The African development bank \(AfDB\)](#) Vice-President observed during the side event that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of global health systems and the gaps in the production of critical drugs on the continent.

Speaking in the same vein, Prof. Padmashree Gehi Sampath, Special Adviser to the President on Pharmaceuticals and Health, African Development Bank and Director, Global Access in Action, Harvard University, pointed out that technology transfer is a critical step in any drug development program.

“Most of African pharmaceutical companies are [currently] using different kinds of technology, the foundation will help countries to look at what are their technology needs,” Prof. Sampath told delegates.



Prof. Padmashree Gehi Sampath, Special Adviser to the President on Pharmaceuticals and Health, African Development Bank and Director, Global Access in Action, Harvard University

According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) guidelines on technology transfer](#) in pharmaceutical manufacturing, the agreements, signed between the

parties involved in technology transfer should mostly cover data management, integrity, documentation and validation.

### ***Addressing health equity***

Commenting on these efforts, Dr Hanan Balkhy, Deputy Director General, World Health Organization (WHO) told delegates that Africa's public health challenges are well known.

"Enhancing access to these technologies for pharmaceutical companies in Africa is a critical step to address many challenges facing the continent to improve healthcare service," he said.

Experts further recognized that strengthening the resilience of Africa's public health systems is urgent in order to boost the continent's ability of the continent's pharmaceutical industry.

"We need to ensure the health system in Africa is resilient (...) with this foundation, we can provide support to address these barriers we are facing such as health equity," said Dr Precious Matsoso, Co-chair of the international Negotiating Body of the WHO on the Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response while referring to the current situation in Africa.

Once operational, the African Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation will prioritize technologies, products and processes focused primarily on diseases that are widely prevalent in Africa, including current and future pandemics.

Dr Richard Hatchett, Chief Executive Officer, [Coalition of Epidemic Preparedness Initiative \(CEPI\)](#) is convinced that stakeholders in this initiative need to learn from the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and help the continent to build resilience

According to him, there have been a number of health care technologies that have saving lives in Africa during the peak of pandemic.

### ***Sustainable funding***

Since the official establishment of the APTF, experts have emphasized the need to expand the manufacturing of essential pharmaceutical products including vaccines in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

However, Prof. Fredrick Abbott, Edward Ball Eminent Scholar Professor, Florida State University, USA told delegates that without sustainable funding for this initiative nothing can work “It is important to focus on the full spectrum of ATPF and ensure there is a timely transfer of technology but allocation of funding,” he said.

[The African Union \(AU\) agenda 2063](#) has underscored the need for the continent to establish a vibrant public health system, focusing on disease prevention and quality clinical care as a prerequisite to attain transformation.

### ***Partnership***

Currently policymakers, researchers and campaigners are discussing innovations that can boost the resilience of healthcare systems in the continent in the light of the pandemic.

Both experts and policymakers believe that partnership is also crucial to improve the manufacturing capacity for vaccines and therapeutics on the continent to enhance response to various diseases and pandemic such as COVID-19.

Ms. Brigit Pickel, Director General for Africa, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany said that his government is committed to support all the move at the institutional level such as Africa Medecine Agency.

“We are committed to facilitate more partnership with African counterpart in pharmaceutical industries (...) It is not only vaccines, it is for the whole pharmaceutical industry value chain production,” the German official told delegates.