

Located in the Kigali Special Economic Zone, Pharmalab Ltd is one of the first Pharmaceutical companies specializing in the manufacture of medical consumables and laboratory products in the region.

The pharmaceutical company is the first locally owned and leading supplier, distributor, and manufacturer of medical and laboratory equipment in Rwanda.

PharmaLab manufactures products like blood tube collections, stool, and urine containers, Surgical face masks, and a range of medical consumables that meet regular market demands with high quality at a favourable price.

When Covid-19 pandemic struck, to control the spread of the disease, PharmaLab became the first Rwandan company to start the manufacture of medical face masks and help citizens access affordable products for their safety.

The idea to start the company began in 1998 with three Rwandan entrepreneurs; Jacqueline Karekezi, and her sister Cecile Nkomeje together with Cyriaque Rugwizangoga.



Cecile Nkomeje (Left) and Jacqueline Karekezi (Right) receiving an award recognizing their contribution in Rwanda's health sector

Karekezi who manages the human resource department at the company reflects that they initially started by opening a medical shop, importing medical equipment from Switzerland.

"At the time, Rwanda was emerging out of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and it was difficult to purchase medical supplies such as surgical masks, gloves, plasters, bandages, and syringes, so we developed an idea to import and supply back at home," She said.

However in 2004, that changed, when the founders took another stride; to become an exclusive distributor of GMBH, Germany Company Human Diagnostics, manufacturers of medical diagnostic devices.

"We signed a contract with a German company to sell laboratory equipment, at the time; the demand for lab equipment was high, thus Pharmalab, a company that specializes in lab equipment was born," Karekezi explains.



Today, Pharmalab still works with Germany Company, and all their products are supplied in all hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries across the country.

“Our niche is to focus on improved customer service, and to retain a longer customer relationship,” She points out.

Building the pharmaceutical plant

According to Cécile Nkomeje, the Managing Director of PharmaLab Ltd, having worked in the health sector in Europe for many years, after Rwanda’s liberation she felt it was time to bring that knowledge and experience back home.



When the Rwandan government encouraged entrepreneurs to initiate production and manufacturing locally, Nkomeje and her partners looked no further but the sector they knew better.

“We were encouraged to be more enterprising and we built a manufacturing plant in Kigali. From the huge piece of land we bought at the Industrial Zone in 2014, in less than two years we inaugurated a pharmaceutical plant in Rwanda,” She said.

The plant set phases to accomplish their plans, where in the first phase of operation, the company had the potential to produce over 25 million medical plastic tubes and 4 million stool containers.



Well, the pharmaceutical began its operations prioritizing the local market but was also able to supply regional countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Burundi, and Tanzania.

The company is gradually expanding more in the region and has ambitions to be the top manufacturer of vitro diagnostics and medical consumables in East Africa.

Karekezi notes that, at first they were faced with low market uptake, spending over three years without steady customers and decided to expand to other countries.

Currently, business is booming, she revealed that their products are very

competitive on the market because of quality with the biggest export market in Tanzania.

They export to most of the East African regional countries and want to expand to reach Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and South Sudan.