

The Challenge of Pharmaceutical Manufacturing in Africa: Improvements through Regional Cooperation

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Excessive dependence on importation of essential drugs threatens to perpetuate the poor state of healthcare in sub-Saharan Africa. The need to establish a high quality pharmaceutical manufacturing base has long been acknowledged by NEPAD. Nonetheless, the local industry seriously lags behind in terms of technology and quality standards. Furthermore, the prevalence of fake drugs and dumping by some foreign manufacturers threaten the stability and growth of the local industry.

Some factors that have contributed to this situation are the high cost of financing pharmaceutical manufacturing projects in Africa, lack of government incentives and high cost as well as poor availability of utilities. In addition, costly, cumbersome and disparate regulatory requirements stifle intra-regional export and favor importation from countries, such as India, where the industry enjoys export incentives and is thus financially better positioned to handle such requirements.

There are a number of ways in which cooperation at the regional level can help the industry. For example, within ECOWAS, there can be incentives for upgrading the standards of the local industry, improving the capacity of the regulatory bodies and harmonizing regulatory requirements for drug registration throughout the region. There is also the urgency for governments within the region to form a unified front in fighting the menace to health and growth of the local industry posed by fake drugs and dumping.