Building Africa's vaccine ecosystem to support health system resilience

Although the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be in retreat across much of Africa, let's not celebrate too early. In 2021, Africa recorded the fastest surge in COVID-19 cases globally and forecasters warn that the continent's vaccine coverage will not reach 70% until August 2024.[1]

Difficulties accessing vaccines have hampered Africa's ability to fight the pandemic. To date, Africa has received about 724 million vaccines doses out of more than 11 billion produced globally. Countries on the continent currently import 99 percent of the routine vaccines they need.

But now, there is real momentum from Africa's public and private sectors to bring manufacturing home.

The pandemic's pressure on health systems and constrained vaccine access has underscored the urgent need for Africa to become more self-sufficient in pharmaceutical and vaccine production. To do this will require strong public-private sector partnerships and the perseverance to build responsive, reliable, and resilient vaccine ecosystems on the continent.

But what will it take to attract the funding and know-how needed to establish vaccine manufacturing ecosystems in Africa?

In April 2021, the African Union and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) announced a bold ambition to produce up to 60% of the vaccines Africa needs by 2040 in Africa through the Partnership for African Vaccines Manufacturing (PAVM) initiative.[2] Several countries have already launched efforts in this direction, including Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda.

To reach its vaccine production goals, Africa will need not only investment, but must also create appropriate and conducive enabling regulatory environments, build technical skills, and access knowledge-sharing.

Getting the ecosystem right is equally important. Governments need to strengthen regulations and build their own capacity to monitor the quality and safety of vaccines produced to establish a strong and credible vaccine ecosystem. There is also an opportunity for countries to leverage regional regulatory improvement initiatives, such as the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonization (AMRH)[3] and the African Medicines Agency (AMA),[4] which together seek to harmonise pharmaceutical regulations across the region, provide guidance for the monitoring and evaluation of all pharmaceutical production, including vaccines, and enhance the region's regulatory capacity.

IFC is supporting a number of vaccine projects to advance Africa's vaccine manufacturing capacity and increase access to vaccines. In most projects, IFC has partnered with other development stakeholders to ensure that all the critical levers of successful vaccine project development are developed in parallel, including commercial, regulatory, human capital, and technical aspects.

For example, in Rwanda,[5] IFC has partnered with the government, BioNTech (a leading biotechnology company), and the kENUP Foundation (a global research-based promoter of innovation), on a project to develop domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity.

In South Africa, IFC is part of a consortium of development partners to support the expansion of Biovac's vaccine manufacturing project.[6] While in Senegal, IFC has partnered with the Institute Pasteur Dakar (IPD) to build local vaccine manufacturing capacity and strengthen the regulatory environment.[7]

Moreover, IFC is also evaluating the ability of health systems in 10 African countries to support vaccine manufacturing.

Investors should take note of the potential of Africa's vaccine market, which, according to McKinsey & Company, is forecast to grow to between $2.3-to-$5.4 billion by 2030, up from its current size of $1.3 billion.[8]

The development benefits of investing in vaccines are even more impressive.

Vaccines have been proven effective as a disease-fighting tool.[9] Building Africa's vaccine production capabilities will help the continent fully recover from COVID-19, the worst pandemic in modern history, and leave it much better placed to face future pandemics.

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Taking your HIV medication EVERY DAY can help you be here when I grow up. I heard there's a "Triple Pill" that can make it easier.

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Every Day.

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The 2014 Namibian Guidelines for Antiretroviral Therapy and The World Health Organization recommend Fixed-Dose Combination Therapy
Consolidated Guidelines on the Use of Antiretroviral Drugs for Treating and Preventing HIV Infection, Geneva, World Health Organization, 2013, (http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/guidelines/arv2013/en)

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