Fake medicines killing over 100,000 Africans annually

Nairobi, Kenya Friday 13th, 2025; A newly released white paper publication indicates that the use of falsified antimalarials is causing over 100,000 unnecessary deaths in Africa.

The Publication by CFAO, a major pharmaceutical distributor in Africa and the OPALS Foundation shows that one in three medicines circulating in Africa may be fake.

In Kenya, where over 70% of medicines are imported, a fragmented distribution network and rising cases of fake drugs are exposing patients to life-threatening risks.

The most falsified drugs in Africa are those considered essential: antibiotics, HIV-AIDS antiretrovirals, antimalarials, pain killers, opioids, among others.

The white paper titled "Securing the Medicine Distribution Network in Africa" indicates that women are excessively exposed with African women being 130 times more likely to die from complications related to pregnancy or childbirth than European and North American women.

For economic, geographical or cultural reasons, or due to unavailability of quality medicines in pharmacies, many African women result to the informal market posing an immense and intolerable risk to them. As a result, for example, a pill that was banned in Kenya ten years ago is still circulating covertly.

The CFAO white paper raises awareness on the critical role of official medicine distribution networks across Africa, and specifically in Kenya. It explores key actors, existing frameworks, and highlights the urgent need for a reliable, traceable supply chain to guarantee the integrity of medicines reaching patients.

Speaking at the release of the white paper, Ken Accajou, Deputy CEO, CFAO Healthcare & Head of English and Portuguese-speaking Area Retail said, "The medicine distribution crisis in Africa is not just a supply chain issue but a matter of life and death. "While Kenya is doing well because of a strong private sector, this white paper is a call to action: we must strengthen official channels and empower local health systems to better protect their people."

The publication is grounded in robust data, expert analysis, and testimonials from across the healthcare ecosystem including government agencies, pharmacists, NGOs, and medical laboratories. These insights are aimed at driving actionable change and fostering a safer, more accessible and efficient pharmaceutical system for all.

"Kenya has made great strides in healthcare, but the fight against counterfeit medicines remains a major challenge," added Gavin Pearson, CEO of CFAO Healthcare Kenya. "By bringing together government, regulators, and private sector players, we can build a safer and more transparent pharmaceutical supply chain. Our goal at CFAO Healthcare Kenya is to ensure that every patient receives genuine, high-quality medicine, no matter where they are."

The white paper also highlights the factors that fuel the illegal pharmaceutical market in Africa: limited access to affordable medicines, supply chain gaps, and the unchecked rise of street markets where unverified drugs are sold. In Kenya, such parallel networks have grown in areas with poor regulatory reach- endangering lives and draining trust from the formal healthcare system.

With 30% of medicines consumed in Kenya already produced locally, expanding domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing offers significant economic and public health benefits, including strengthened supply chains and reduced exposure to substandard and falsified medicines.

The full white paper is available for download at www.cfaohealthcare.com and www.opals.asso.fr/faux-medicaments.

About CFAO Healthcare

CFAO Healthcare is a Pan-African leader in pharmaceutical distribution, committed to securing access to high-quality medicines for all African countries. CFAO Healthcare supplies medicines and pharmaceutical products in 24 African countries and 6 French Overseas Territories. Product integrity is maintained throughout the logistical import chain, from storage to pharmacy, notably through the Laborex network, which delivers daily to over 11,000 pharmacies in French-speaking Africa, English-speaking Africa, and the French Overseas Territories. CFAO Healthcare also manufactures licensed medicines in Morocco and Algeria and assembles and distributes generic medicine kits and medical consumables for Africa. Its expertise is built on complete control of the supply chain, adhering to the highest quality and traceability standards, from production and import to the pharmacy and ultimately to the patient. www.cfaohealthcare.com.

About the OPALS Foundation

The OPALS Foundation (Organisation PanAfricaine de Lutte pour la Santé) combines the objectives and resources of the Chirac Foundation and the OPALS Association. Its mission is to combat the scourge of trafficking in counterfeit medicines, vaccines, and medical devices; denounce health fraud in all its forms; and improve access to quality healthcare for all. It relentlessly leads the mobilization for quality medicine, for all, delivered by qualified professionals, with approved medicines, controlled vaccines, and certified medical devices. The OPALS Foundation is protected by the Fondation de l'Académie de Médecine (FAM). For more information, visit opals.asso.fr/faux medicaments/

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