



OUTCOME REPORT OF WORKSHOP

TO VALIDATE TECHNICAL PAPERS
ON VACCINES AND VACCINATIONS



The Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA), in partnership with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and the Pan-African Manufacturers Association (PAMA) convened a workshop of stakeholders from the research, civil society, the private and public sectors, and independent development on 28 & 29 October 2021. The two-day virtual workshop featured two presentations: Research and Development for Vaccines Manufacturing in Africa and Advocacy for Vaccines Manufacturing and Distribution in Africa. Both papers highlighted key issues in vaccines research and development (R&D) and manufacturing for Africa.

THE WHY

The presenters and participants said Africa should be self-sufficient in vaccine production and become a recognized and valid producer of vaccines considering that the continent has the largest market for vaccines globally. They noted the need to move from dependence on foreign vaccine donations or procurement to local production so that Africans can have enough to take care of their vaccination needs and to benefit from the vaccines business.

THE HOW

Strengthening and building partnerships

The need to strengthen existing partnerships, collaborations and alliances and build new, strong and sustainable ones on vaccines R&D and manufacturing came out strongly from the discussions. Participants said partnerships are needed to mobilize the huge resources needed, leverage resources and capacity, and learn from other continents and countries like China, Cuba and India.

Such partnerships, participants said, should be designed to achieve specific milestones and driven by the interest, goal and agenda of the continent. They should be equitable, focused on addressing diseases that are most endemic in Africa, and be beneficial to all countries including the smaller countries. Participants noted the importance of strengthening public-private partnerships and the collaborations between institutions and African Union Member States to ensure access to critical information and mutually beneficial technical assistance.

Strengthening existing platforms

Participants noted that while building partnerships, it is essential to strengthen the capacity of existing institutions such as Afreximbank, and platforms, professional associations, and networks. Examples are the African Medical Supplies and the African Vaccines Acquisition Trust, which was created to support financing of COVID-19 vaccines acquisition and distribution. They noted the need to build more Africa-focused institutions that can drive Africa's vaccine development agenda.

Financing of vaccine development and manufacturing initiatives

Participants noted the poor resourcing of vaccine R&D in Africa compared to the developed economies and other parts of the world and the need to embark on targeted and coordinated fundraising within the continent to make funds available for manufacturing ventures by African institutions. They requested CoDA and its partners to provide guidance on the essential partnerships required and conduct analysis of the factors hindering financing at the continental level with a view to addressing the bottlenecks in a sustainable way.

Adopting a continental approach

Participants noted that Africa has a large vaccines market and for this reason should adopt a regional approach to engagement to give the continent a comparative advantage when negotiating vaccine deals. They expressed displeasure with the current practice of establishing vaccine deals with individual countries as opposed to regional or continental agreements, which would be more sustainable. In this regard, they noted the need to commission an Africa-wide study on R&D capacity and infrastructure, define the R&D value chain, and support the building of complimentary R&D and manufacturing hubs in the continent.

Capacity strengthening

Considering the shortage of capacity on the continent to drive vaccines R&D and manufacturing, participants emphasized the need to develop skilled expertise for vaccine R&D design in Africa through institutional arrangements, including support for technology transfers by the “big pharma”. This they said is critical to fill the gaps in clinical knowledge and process exposure, and one way to do this is to strengthen existing or build new networks of researchers and research institutions. They noted the need to provide incentives and essential infrastructure that will attract and retain the required capacity, including diaspora scientists, for vaccines R&D and manufacturing. They noted that less than 2 percent of clinical trials are currently conducted in Africa and highlighted the critical need to strengthen capacity for clinical trials as a bridge between R&D and vaccine manufacturing, including the potential to accelerate the pace of clinical trials in response to emergencies, epidemics and pandemics. They further highlighted the need to accelerate the building of vital human capacity in epidemiological data and analytics and, as a starting point, to develop a talent inventory for vaccines R&D and manufacturing in the continent.

Investing in large scale production

To attract the African private sector, respond to the anticipated needs of the growing population, and the large number of Africa-specific diseases, vaccine manufacturing must be possible on a large scale. This, participants say, will give Africa the competitive advantage. They emphasized the need to produce active pharmaceutical ingredients in Africa as a critical prerequisite to strengthening health systems in the continent.

Demand creation

Participants noted that there is a large market for vaccines in Africa because the disease burden in the continent is higher than in other regions. They highlighted the need to identify and sensitize key stakeholders towards the critical need to support and sustain vaccine R&D and manufacturing in Africa. They said the African health sector and governments should be encouraged to support local vaccine R&D and manufacturing efforts in Africa through implementing advanced market options that would ensure economic viability of African vaccine products. They said African governments and academic institutions, including private sector entities, should be encouraged to provide the enabling environment for vaccines R&D and manufacturing. Participants said it is imperative to develop incentives that can attract the private sector such as tax incentives.

Planning and prioritization

Participants noted that planning and prioritization are complex but essential steps in achieving self-sufficiency in vaccine production and that should be based on current needs. They said, to establish sustainable vaccines production systems, Africa must create its own vaccines development agenda before engaging or discussing any partnerships and collaborations should develop a roadmap that covers the entire vaccine value chain to kickstart vaccine R&D and manufacturing. They noted that it is important to begin with enhanced distribution, filling and packaging while training personnel for research and production and then move to the development of active pharmaceutical ingredients. They added that to streamline interventions, the continent must create costed plans, procurement systems and logistics and supply frameworks that indicate the essential partnerships and resources needed.

Policy and regulation

Participants noted that policy and regulation are essential and critical components of vaccines R&D and manufacturing and should involve the different stakeholders – private sector, manufacturers, policymakers, public sector, civil society. They noted the need for policy harmonization across the continent to enhance traction for vaccines development and manufacturing, including policy frameworks that would enhance the mobility of researchers across the continent. Once all the necessary consultations have been completed and key frameworks and tools developed, they said it would be essential to present the ideas to the Heads of State through the African Union for discussion, adoption and commissioning.

Private sector engagement

Participants noted the need for a stronger healthcare private sector in Africa and emphasized the need for systematic, fair and equitable engagement of the private sector to build consensus and facilitate buy-in and ownership. They said some surveys would be necessary to determine how prepared and willing the private sector is to take this on and to know which of the private sector players would be best placed to start with. Engagement should also be extended to international donors, and development organizations and the foreign private sector.