

Push for Local Vaccine Production as race for COVID-19 antidote continues

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Cape Town/South Africa - The World is facing an unprecedented health challenge that has seen the loss of over 500,000 in just 7 months. The novel 2019 Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) was first reported on 31st December 2019 and declared a global pandemic a month later by the World Health Organization on 30th March 2020.

The first case in Africa, which has since reported over 350,000 cases, was reported 14th February 2020 in Egypt. The importation of this disease into the continent has presented a number of shocks on an already fragile healthcare system in Africa. The healthcare infrastructure as it is, has been tested and continues to be stretched even as social and behavioural measures including lockdowns continue to be affected.

This pandemic has not put on hold other diseases that Africa continues to grapple with, especially the vaccine preventable diseases. Earlier in the year, [a BBC report](#), indicated that the WHO noted the measles epidemic in DR Congo as the world's largest and fastest moving having claimed over 6,000 people with around 310,000 suspected cases.

It is impressive to note that there are several [COVID-19 vaccine candidates](#) that are both in design and in trial. This is welcome news and presents a unique opportunity to look at the entire vaccine development pipeline with intentions to strengthen it more so in Africa.

Our theory of change

Africa accounts for 17% of the World's population with a 25% disease burden. We also know that Africa's healthcare system is fragile and continues to be threatened by a myriad of challenges including political. Vaccine production in Africa remains extremely low, estimated to be less than 1% of the vaccines used in Africa.

We believe that increasing Africa's capacity to produce her own vaccines makes it available for use when needed and preventing a number of deaths. We also believe that producing vaccines locally for diseases resident in Africa is not only a matter of national health security but can be a shared investment among regions that experience disease.

The emergence of COVID-19 as a global pandemic presents a unique opportunity to strengthen the current efforts towards local production of vaccines at whatever point in the long and complex vaccine development timeline. Even as several COVID-19 vaccine candidates are in design and trial, we call for intentional and deliberate strategies to make sure that for any vaccine licensed for use against COVID-19 globally, the African doses will be manufactured in Africa.

“The need now for strengthened vaccine manufacturing capacity on the African continent cannot be overemphasized. The needs for national health security and social development and pandemic threats do not allow Africa's vaccine output to lag behind. This would be disastrous. Now is the time to act. I am confident that my motherland is up to the task.” Prof. William Ampofo, AVMI Board Chair.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Executive Director, Dr. Songwe, explains that one cannot develop and manufacture a vaccine in isolation; and that the African continent has a growing number of pharmaceutical industries and with pooled resources including intellectual, the private sector in Africa can deliver a COVID-19 vaccine manufactured in Africa. Dr Songwe made these remarks at the recently convened Africa's Leadership in COVID-19 Vaccine Development and Access Conference by AU and Africa-CDC.

H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa, Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Republic of South Africa when opening the AU and Africa-CDC Conference noted that the success in developing and providing access to a safe vaccine requires an innovative and collaborative approach, with significant local manufacturing in Africa. He pointed out the need to support the contribution of African scientists and healthcare professionals. He concluded by emphasizing how acting with urgency was crucial.

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