

El Bouhmedi (FMIIP): "The African continent represents enormous potential for our pharmaceutical industry"

Africa, whose population is 1.3 billion, has barely 375 pharmaceutical establishments, compared to 10,500 in India, for a comparable population. With the African Continental Free Trade Area, many opportunities are available to the Kingdom, provided that certain obstacles around cooperation are removed. Point.

During the 20th edition of Officine Expo, organized on February 24 and 25 in Marrakech, the president of the Moroccan Federation of Pharmaceutical Industry and Innovation (FMIIP), Mohamed El Bouhmedi, spoke of the potential represented by the Africa for the Moroccan pharmaceutical industry, but also the obstacles to South- South cooperation in the sector.

375 pharmaceutical establishments for 1.3 billion inhabitants.

"Africa represents **1.1%** of the world market in terms of drug consumption," said Mr. El Bouhmedi, who believes that this rate remains low compared to other countries, whose population is similar to that of the continent.

"Africa's population stands at **1.3 billion**, while the continent has barely **375 pharmaceutical establishments**. The population is expected to reach 1.7 billion in 2030, 2.5 billion in 2050 and 4.5 billion in 2100".

The pharmaceutical industry will have to be able to meet the growing need for drugs.

Mr. El Bouhmedi recalls that "North America alone accounts for **46%** of global drug consumption, compared to **24%** in Europe, and **14%** in Asia-Pacific".

"In comparison with the industrial fabric in China, whose population estimated at 1.4 billion inhabitants is similar to that of Africa, the country has approximately **5,000 pharmaceutical establishments**. 'also amounts to nearly 1.4 billion inhabitants, and pharmaceutical establishments to **10,500 establishments**."

Another observation, "Africa imports **70% to 90%** of its need for medicines, and according to the World Health Organization (WHO), **42% of counterfeit medicines circulate in Africa**, due to lax regulations in certain areas". In addition, "the African Continental Free Trade Area (Zlecaf) will help create 16 million jobs and develop a very significant turnover". This shows the potential that the continent represents for Morocco.

"We must carry out research adapted to Africa, to develop innovative products and patent them."

"The Kingdom is present in Africa through the export of its know-how, the installation of factories and the transfer of technologies, but there is still great potential to be exploited, particularly in terms of the construction of factories. Nevertheless, if national laboratories invest in Africa to fill the void in the sector, within the framework of a South-South partnership, **logistical and financial obstacles persist** and hinder this cooperation."

The president of the FMIIP cites in particular **the mutual recognition of certifications and authorizations**. "Morocco has been a candidate to host the African Medicines Agency, which has been entrusted to Rwanda, but industrial work remains to be done to be present in everything that will be decided at the African level, and to be a stakeholder in the project."

"Today, when we want to export to Africa, **the registration of our products sometimes takes up to four years**. The process is therefore very long... When there is mutual recognition of authorizations and certifications, the things will be easier."

"We also need to develop an African innovation hub. We have different genotypes and diets. We therefore need to carry out research adapted to Africa, to develop innovative products and patent them."

In this sense, "we must also create **a body that encourages multidisciplinary research**, with cooperation in Africa. We must not be satisfied simply with basic research, but also with applied research, and encourage clinical trials, of which very few are made in Morocco".

The second point that blocks South-South cooperation concerns the distribution network. "To be able to export their pharmaceutical products to Africa, laboratories are **forced to go through Rouen**, which then transfers them to Côte d'Ivoire or Senegal, for example. When a product is out of stock, its resupply **requires four months in minimum**."

"It is therefore absolutely necessary **to create a distribution platform** in an African country, which makes it possible to centralize distributions, by bringing together several distributor operators in Africa."

On the legal side, things remain to be done. "In Morocco there are three statuses of pharmaceutical activity : activity of the industrial pharmaceutical establishment

EPI, activity of the pharmaceutical wholesaler-distributor establishment EPGR and the activity of the dispensing pharmacy.", explains Mr. El Bouhmadi.

"When we want to export our pharmaceutical products to Africa, they must first be registered and marketed in Morocco. We must therefore resolve this regulatory aspect to have a status that allows distribution without having to register the products. This point has already been discussed with our supervisory authority."

"The member laboratories of the FMIIP realize 5.2% of the GDP of the industrial sector and 1.5% of the national GDP."

The president of the FMIIP also returned to the new Agency for Medicines and Health Products, which will soon be created.

"To support us in our development, we need an agency, and we are happy to count the launch of the Agency for Medicines and Health Products", he underlined.

"It will have management autonomy, will be able to draw up drug development strategies, as well as significant human and financial resources, which will support the development of the pharmaceutical industry in Morocco."

"An ad hoc committee has already been created for its implementation. We hope that it will be quickly connected to the African Medicines Agency, so that they can collaborate and campaign for the mutual recognition of authorizations and certifications."

Finally, Mr. El Bouhmadi recalled the main figures relating to the Moroccan pharmaceutical industrial fabric. "The country has 54 authorized laboratories in Morocco - which have a pharmaceutical factory -, 12,000 pharmacies and 66 wholesale distributors."

"The pharmaceutical industry sector employs more than 60,000 direct and indirect people. In 2021 and 2022, the sector achieved a turnover of 17 billion DH (MMDH)."

"The member laboratories of the FMIIP make **800 million DH (MDH) of investments per year**, and contribute for 5.2 to the industrial GDP and 1.5 to the national GDP."