



# FOLLOWING AFRICA'S LEAD:

Strengthening national and regional  
pandemic defenses

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**SUMMARY & TAKEAWAYS**  
MAY 2022





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## Strengthening national and regional pandemic defenses

### *Summary & takeaways*

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On 13 April 2022, the Paris Peace Forum and Pandemic Action Network co-hosted – with the support of the French Presidency of the European Union – a roundtable attended by a range of high-level policymakers, health experts, and practitioners from different institutions and organizations. Its composition aimed to gather diverse perspectives from health agencies, delivery organizations, government, research institutions, foundations, the private sector, and civil society, each involved in the health agenda between the European Union and the African Union.

The discussion was structured under three workstreams addressing regional cooperation and partnerships for production capacities, with a general focus on strengthening health systems. Each workstream had a set of guiding questions shared in advance with participants. The discussion was held under the Chatham House rule, and as such, neither the list of attendees nor the remarks explicitly attributed to them will be shared.

The first part of this document summarizes the key takeaways of the roundtable, and the second (from page 10) is a series of recommendations solely from the two co-hosting organizations – Pandemic Action Network and the Paris Peace Forum – inspired by the discussion.

# I - WORKSTREAM 1

## STRENGTHENING HEALTH SYSTEMS BY LEARNING FROM THE COVID-19 VACCINATION EXPERIENCE

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This workstream discussed lessons from the COVID-19 response and specific actions that should be prioritized or scaled up to improve Africa's national and regional health systems. It sought to identify policies, investments, and cross-continental partnerships (including the way health ODA is channeled) to strengthen the continent's capacities to prevent, manage, and overcome future pandemics – such as the training of health personnel (including through the WHO Academy) and innovative financing mechanisms.

### 1.1. Questions discussed

- What lessons learned can we draw from the COVID-19 response in Africa regarding vaccines and other medical countermeasures? What were the major bottlenecks regarding the delivery of vaccine doses? What prevented rapid vaccination uptake once the vaccine doses were in the countries?
- Considering the lessons learned during the COVID pandemic, what measures should be considered now and for future pandemics to (a) meet vaccination targets and (b) prevent vaccine waste?
- What are the current health systems' strengthening priorities in Africa? What policy recommendations are needed to accelerate innovative financing and the training of health personnel?
- Is there a divergence of priorities between the goals and targets set for improving vaccination campaigns and health systems at a multilateral level, with a regional, national, and local analysis of African needs both in terms of vaccination and, more broadly, on health systems strengthening? For example, in the need to target specific sectors (primary health care, training, hospital density, health community workers, AMR, etc.)?

## 1.2. Takeaways

**Regional coordination and political leadership.** Concerted political action at regional and national levels is critical to keep pandemic preparedness and response a top priority and drive change. We need to foster and encourage global, regional, and national coordination while establishing clear lines of responsibility and accountability at and between all levels. We also need to particularly strengthen the role of regional health organizations and identify opportunities for joint/coordinated policies and investments.

**Country strategy on pandemic preparedness.** Country strategies play a fundamental role in pandemic preparedness and response, especially when these include plans for the delivery of vaccines and other medical countermeasures. The COVID-19 pandemic experience shows that the emphasis on supply overshadowed the relevance of country strategies - which delayed vaccination efforts. It will be necessary to acknowledge who is responsible for planning on-the-ground strategy, including delivery at the national and regional levels, and make sure we learn the lessons from COVID-19.

**Long-term investments in health systems play a crucial role in pandemic response.** Previous investments in health systems

(such as cold chain capacity, surveillance, diagnostics, and lab services) are key to consider when planning future investments for pandemic response. Among them, leveraging primary healthcare and community health workers should be prioritized. It will be important to move away from reactive investments and further toward longer-term planning strategies.

**Build on routine immunization systems.** Aside from mass campaigns, routine immunization systems are instrumental in increasing vaccination on the continent of Africa. It is crucial to build upon them in the long term, enabling countries to take advantage of a more stable vaccine supply by channeling routine vaccination processes to deploy new vaccines. It will also be essential to address vaccine hesitancy across countries.

**Supply predictability and transparency.** Despite the world having a more stable vaccine supply in Q2 2022, there is still a long way to improve supply predictability and transparency of production (timing, volume, etc.). Improved transparency on all these fronts will help LMICs plan better vaccination campaigns.



**Flexible funding.** The lack of availability of flexible funding mechanisms has been a significant challenge. The lack of such funds undermined vaccination efforts during the COVID-19 emergency response and has eroded trust in the global health architecture. It remains an urgent priority to devise and set in motion innovative and flexible financing mechanisms that help fund – along with domestic resources – the diverse needs of health systems in the continent.

## II - WORKSTREAM 2

### PARTNERSHIP FOR PRODUCTION CAPACITIES FOR COVID-19 AND BEYOND

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This workstream focused on how to build up and develop industries that emerged as part of the COVID-19 response in Africa over the longer term, identifying what kinds of investments are needed (including market access and financing). It also discussed governance challenges and opportunities for regulatory cooperation.

#### 2.1. Questions discussed

- In the follow-up of the EU-AU Summit and building on different Team Europe initiatives, what is needed to ensure sustainable production capacities? How can we ensure that production is aligned with local, national, and regional demands?
- What conclusions can be drawn from the launch of the vaccine technology transfer hub on production capacities, and which lessons learned can be extracted to help this hub thrive and for other models?
- Regarding the regulatory environment for health products in the medium- and long-run, how can we ensure such regulations meet the standards required

for developing the production of health products in African countries and facilitate their exports across the continent?

- Considering these challenges, what are the priorities that the African Medicines Agency should be focusing on regarding regulatory approval for priority health products which could be produced by African production centers in order to counter major health outbreaks?

#### 2.2. Takeaways

**Moving towards a thriving health Research and Development (R&D) ecosystem in Africa.** The continent needs to overcome multiple challenges before it can boost the development and production of vaccines on its own. Some of these are:

- **Technology absorption and workforce.** In parallel to technology transfer efforts, it will be equally important to invest in developing a local workforce with the necessary skills to use and access new technologies. WHO's global biomanufacturing training hub in South Korea was mentioned as an example.

- **Regulation and regional knowledge sharing.** R&D investments will need to be supported by adequate regulation and regional synergies. In this regard, the importance of investing in a fully independent African Medicines Agency (AMA) capable of promoting local research and production was underlined.
- **Intellectual property (IP) and technology transfers.** Addressing intellectual property rights remains necessary for essential therapeutics to end the current pandemic. In the long term, it will be necessary to put the emphasis on technology transfers and partnerships that consolidate Africa's capacities to develop and produce their own vaccines. The mRNA vaccine technology hub in South Africa is a step in this direction.

**Market incentives.** A significant challenge to consolidating Africa's production capacities will be related to market-shaping and the ability of its production units to address market needs. In other words, it will be crucial to make sure plants are used and useful between pandemics, to "keep them warm." This could imply a commitment from political leadership to support local production capacities through voluntary pricing policies.

Multilateral donors can also contribute by procuring vaccines and other therapeutics from producers on the continent.

**Capacity sustainability.** In line with the previous point, making production capacities sustainable will also necessitate political leadership, recognizing that the continent's health security requires continued investments (similar to defense capacities). These could focus on developing local upstream supply chains (base-management products, cold-chain, etc.). Local and regional public procurement can play a crucial role, but it demands reviewing existing policies.

**Innovation partnership and financing models.** Collaboration will be a crucial success factor in overcoming most of the challenges identified. Therefore, it is important to explore which knowledge-sharing models – either bilateral or multilateral – have yielded results in other regions (such as those in Korea or Brazil) and innovate new forms of partnerships. This also applies to financing, where innovative models are necessary to frontload investments to secure contracts for lifesaving tools.

## III - WORKSTREAM 3

### REGIONAL COOPERATION: EU-AU PARTNERSHIP TO STRENGTHEN GLOBAL AND NATIONAL HEALTH GOVERNANCE

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This workstream reviewed progress, challenges, and ways to improve broad health cooperation across Africa and Europe, primarily through regional institutions like the African Union, Africa CDC, and others. It aimed to identify clear recommendations for joint action to strengthen health systems and increase health resilience and pandemic preparedness and response across both continents.

#### 3.1. Questions discussed

- How can regional cooperation among existing initiatives concerning regulation, pathogen surveillance, and genomic sequencing be improved? Are there opportunities for collaborating in training specialized personnel and setting up health guidelines?
- What are the "missing pieces" for Euro-African cooperation on health? Are sub-regional actors sufficiently and efficiently involved?
- How can we build on the EU-AU cooperation framework to properly integrate the continent's priorities into

the discussion on the reform of the multilateral health architecture, especially on financing and governance?



### 3.2. Takeaways

Despite mixed perceptions about the success of the EU-AU Summit in revamping the relationship between the two blocs, there is a shared belief that the EU-AU relationship provides a working platform with a solid potential to strengthen collaboration and partnerships around public health.

Previous experiences provide learnings to help reach agreements and concrete results faster. However, there are concerns about ensuring the EU-AU partnership is one between equals.

The momentum gained during the Summit to boost Africa's public health capacities could lose traction if both parties do not translate those political commitments into results. It is still necessary to identify coordinated, targeted, and specific actions that could be taken swiftly over the coming months and with broad support and partnerships across the private sector, civil society, and beyond to consolidate progress.

There are different goals to pursue, which offer multiple starting points. For instance, collaboration around regulation and between regional regulatory agencies provides opportunities for immediate action.

There are opportunities to build a shared and better understanding of public goods for pandemic response and preparedness. It will be necessary to embed them in policies and other agreements and define the roles and involvement of countries, regions, health bodies, and the private sector.

There are already some initiatives in place that should be considered—for example, TEI MAV+. Also, there are already partnerships in place between African and European Medicines Agencies, or the Africa CDC and ECDC, that can be expanded or reinforced.



## IV - RECOMMENDATIONS

### PANDEMIC ACTION NETWORK AND PARIS PEACE FORUM'S INSIGHTS TO MOVE FORWARD IN THE EU-AU COOPERATION AGENDA AND STRENGTHEN PANDEMIC DEFENSES IN AFRICA

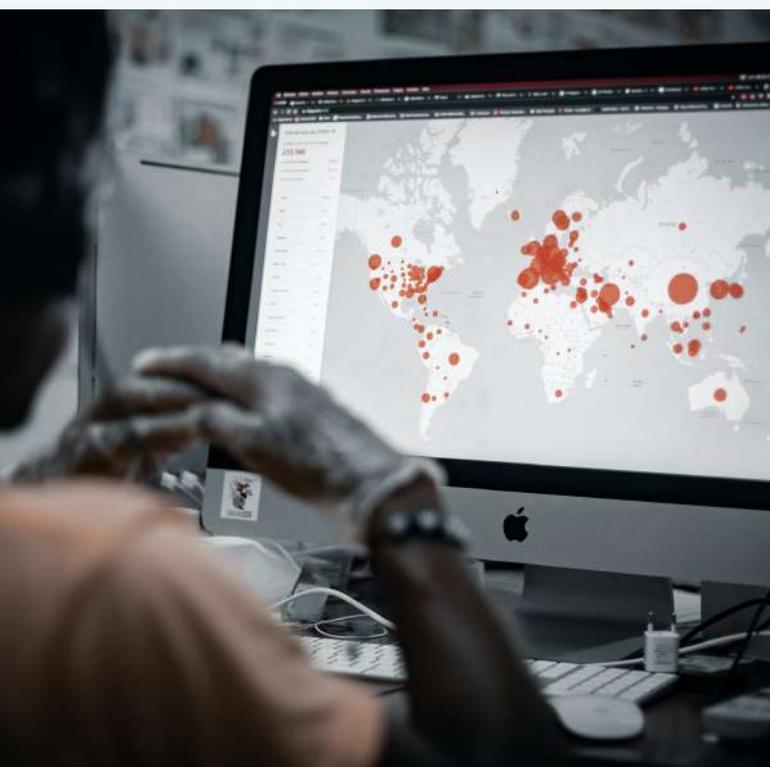
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Based on the insights and reflections of the different voices that joined the roundtable discussion, Pandemic Action Network and the Paris Peace Forum have identified three priority recommendations – each with suggested actions – to support EU-AU Summit commitments concerning pandemic preparedness and response. These recommendations reflect the most important points raised by the different actors in this discussion, which did not address the entire global health agenda. Many more actions are needed to improve pandemic preparedness and response.

#### 4.1. Structure EU-AU pandemic preparedness and response cooperation around underpinning regional coordination and country-led strategies on health systems

##### *Suggested action points:*

- Integrate the strengthening of the regionalization process in multilateral discussions and consider national and regional strategies to foster coherence with global efforts.
- Devise a mechanism within the EU-AU partnership to collect and systematize existing country strategies on pandemic preparedness and response, and provide support to develop or update them where necessary.
- Based on the analysis of country strategies, identify opportunities for shared policies and joint investments, giving a priority role in coordinating them to regional health organizations (such as Africa CDC and AMA) and subregional mechanisms.



## 4.2. Enhance international solidarity mechanisms for tackling vaccine and therapeutics inequity in Africa

### Suggested action points

#### *Suggested action points:*

- Devise new flexible financing mechanisms within the EU-AU partnership to strengthen national health systems, mainly primary healthcare, and adequately fund global instruments such as COVAX and ACT-A to address the persisting gap in access to vaccines, tests, and other therapeutics in Africa.
- Set in place measures that increase the transparency and predictability of vaccine supplies – from contracts to production to delivery and administration – so that African countries can adjust immunization strategies and meet vaccination goals.

## 4.3. Fostering the emergence of a sustainable African R&D and manufacturing ecosystem to expand production capacity

#### *Suggested action points:*

- Expand regional R&D collaboration platforms, ensuring full access to technologies, including intellectual property and technology transfer, in

close coordination with global and regional health bodies – such as the WHO mRNA Technology Transfer Hub in South Africa, Team Europe's Initiative on Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies in Africa (TEI MAV+), or other existing initiatives.

- Identify priority areas for transfer of knowledge and set in place mechanisms that ensure the full development of the local workforce needed for R&D and sustainable production through initiatives such as the WHO biomanufacturing training hub in South Korea.
- Devise and prioritize regional and sequenced investments that (a) increase Africa's capacities to manufacture to a large extent its own vaccines and therapeutics and (b) strengthen national health systems according to the identified country priorities.
- Foster sustainable production and manufacturing capacities through market incentives and regulatory policy. For example, set up mechanisms that provide market information, incentives, financing, and other kinds of support to local and regional "ever warm" manufacturing facilities to meet the needs of health systems in Africa.

- Establish a working group on market sustainability and regulation, tasked with identifying best practices and policies to support manufacturing facilities remaining viable in between pandemics.





### **About Pandemic Action Network**

Pandemic Action Network is a global advocacy platform – a partnership of over 250 global multi-sector organizations – built to end the COVID crisis for everyone and ensure the world is prepared for the next pandemic threat. Pandemic Action Network catalyzes actions, fills gaps, works collaboratively, translates learnings and insights into clear messaging, and provides expert policy, advocacy, and communications recommendations, all focusing on advancing pandemic preparedness and ending the COVID-19 crisis for everyone around the world. Find out more: [www.pandemicactionnetwork.org](http://www.pandemicactionnetwork.org)



### **About the Paris Peace Forum**

Launched in 2018, the Paris Peace Forum serves to create a multi-actor platform in Paris to address global governance issues. Throughout the year, the Forum works with actors from across the world - including the global South - to strengthen the governance of global commons, including on public health, climate, outer space, and digital issues. Its annual event gathers heads of state, governments, international organizations, civil society leaders, and the private sector around concrete solutions for better global governance.