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Fadela Benjelloun, executive director of LEMM, the association of multinational pharma companies in Morocco, looks back on the evolution of the Moroccan pharma market over the past three years, examines the access to innovation situation today, and the impact of the generational healthcare reform currently underway in the country.

Could you briefly introduce LEMM, the association of multinational pharmaceutical companies in Morocco?

The Pharmaceutical Companies of Morocco (LEMM), founded in 2005, brings together the Moroccan subsidiaries of international bio-pharmaceutical companies focused on R&D, which have been present in Morocco for several decades. Holding over 52 percent of the private pharmaceutical market, our members cover all therapeutic areas and provide healthcare professionals with both traditional and innovative therapeutic solutions. They are also involved in the prevention field, targeting diverse diseases in children and certain diseases in adults (such as pneumonia, meningitis, cervical cancer, flu, and COVID-19).

As major players in biomedical research, our members strive for modern medicine, combining new scientific knowledge with technological advances. Thus, the development of biomedical research remains one of our major objectives in Morocco. We work towards introducing the latest therapeutic innovations from research to the Moroccan market and focus on ensuring equitable

access to these innovations for all patients who need them.

At LEMM, we aim for excellence and capitalize on the expertise of our members throughout the sector’s entire value chain. We bring together all our resources to support the Kingdom’s leadership at both regional and continental levels.

How has the way in which international companies perceive Morocco and the Moroccan market evolved in recent years?

Many international companies have entrusted Morocco and settled here for several decades. These companies have contributed to the development of production and distribution capacities in the industry, especially through continuous innovation and strong partnerships with local actors. Others are more focused on Morocco’s economic and political stability, its geographical location and its infrastructure and support offering.

The drug sector is already well regulated in Morocco, Strengthening and enriching the regulatory framework will make it even more competitive, attractive and favourable to future investments. This is regardless of the business model utilised in establishing a presence in the territory, whether in terms of local production (own-brand or through commercial partnerships), building up Morocco as a platform for export, or as a centre of excellence for biomedical research.

Similar to what exists worldwide, regulatory reinforcement through new statutes will foster the emergence of a new dynamic in the sector, as well as significant investments in the future to ensure the availability of medicines for a national sovereignty connected to knowledge, innovation and international R&D.

How would you define the access level to innovative medicines in Morocco?

Access to therapeutic innovation should be considered an investment rather than a mere expense. Access to therapeutic innovation represents a short-term opportunity for the patient and a medium- to long- term opportunity for the healthcare system. In the context of the Compulsory Health Insurance (AMO) generalization, the goal is not to spend less, but to invest better. This is how we will generate more value for patients and society.

Globally, budget constraints have not limited patients’ access to needed therapeutic innovations, even when they are expensive. Financing solutions for innovation exist everywhere and rely on

public-private partnerships. These partnerships, called innovative contracts, mostly involve financial agreements or clauses. For example, in OECD countries, these financial agreements constitute the majority (93 percent) of agreements.

This is not yet the case in Morocco, where access to innovation remains very limited. Proposals from LEMM have been submitted to the relevant authorities for simple financing models to be implemented. In addition to improving access to therapeutic innovation, these contracts can generate real-world data that will greatly and effectively contribute to future strategic decision-making, in addition to budgetary savings.

Lastly, the concept of health technology assessment is a project still in its infancy. We hope that an evaluation project process will be established promptly, taking into account the specificities of our country. We support the idea that all stakeholders converging toward a common goal – patient interest – is a prerequisite for improving patient access. This should be at the core of each actor's priorities, aiming for optimal care and therapeutic innovations.

How have Morocco's ongoing healthcare reforms improved access to care in the country?

The ongoing reform aims to enhance and strengthen the healthcare offering in Morocco, along with the establishment of universal health insurance. Significant resources have been mobilized to support this endeavour. Major transformative projects are being carried out to improve population access to quality care, including:

- Rehabilitation of Primary Care Facilities (ESSP) nationwide,
- Strengthening hospital care through building and/or equipping new University Hospitals (CHUs). The goal is to have a CHU in each of the 12 regions of Morocco,
- Completion of ongoing and planned works in several hospitals,
- Implementation of services within the integrated information system,
- Creation of territorial health groups aiming to integrate CHUs and all regional hospital healthcare offerings into a single autonomous establishment.

Furthermore, this overhaul is being accompanied by the establishment of crucial bodies for its success, such as the High Health Authority, the Agency of Medicines and Health Products, the Blood and Blood Products Agency, and the Mohamed VI Foundation for Science and Health, which will carry out any activity to reinforce and support the national healthcare system. All these

initiatives and achievements demonstrate that the reform is ready to have a positive impact on improving access to care. We firmly believe that this reform will achieve its objectives in the near future, and we strongly support it.

What message would like to convey to our international audience?

Morocco is currently undergoing extensive reforms in all sectors and the development potential of the pharmaceutical sector is significant. As LEMM, we support the idea that predictability, good governance, and regulations that support innovation will guide the expansion of the sector for the benefit of citizens.

The healthcare ecosystem, with the expansion of AMO, is becoming an important social and economic sector offering significant investment opportunities. Therefore, I invite all international actors in the healthcare ecosystem who wish to develop their activities to explore the promising opportunities that Morocco offers as a country undergoing reform with sustained growth.

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