Hubert de Ruty – Country Manager, Pfizer Morocco



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The country manager of Pfizer Morocco talks about the likelihood of Morocco becoming an African hub and why Pfizer is at the perfect size to play a key part in such a process, as well as how the country's price decree hurt the multinational corporations.

Having been elected head of MIS (*Maroc Innovation & Santé*) beginning of February, what are the priorities for your mandate and the hot topics of the moment?

Indeed I was recently elected as the new head of MIS, but had previously been vice-President and as such was already familiar with the workings of the association. Today the main aim for MIS is to accelerate with the direction taken during these last few years. In particular to accelerate building the partnership with the Moroccan authorities, the minister of health, and the minister of industry, who for us today are both extremely important, as well as more generally with all stakeholders involved in health.

The priority for us is access to treatments for patients, particularly important in an emerging country. This is likewise the priority of the minister of health, who is someone who has taken important decisions to really advance the debate and has put in place serious reforms impacting the daily lives of Moroccans. And I hope that the lowering of innovative drug prices that we have implemented as an industry will have a positive impact on the Moroccan population.

When you speak of reforms improving access to treatments, are you referring to RAMED?

There are many aspects involved in the reform process. RAMED is certainly a significant part of it and is an extremely laudable reform. Today we have over 40 percent of the population covered, and thanks to RAMED more and more people have access to treatments and medicines. The second element concerns the lowering of prices. Previously it was completed in waves, in 2013 there were around 300 drugs included, whereas now the government has set a very clear framework for reducing prices, a benchmark framework based initially on seven selected countries, now six. With the benchmark the authorities take the average drug price across the six countries. The reality was, the average drug price in Morocco was not expensive. Like everywhere, we had certain products that were more expensive, and some which were cheaper. But in general when you look at the average drug price it was already the lowest from the countries included in the benchmark. However, MIS is supportive of this benchmark and the lowering of prices.

There are around 800 products where the price has been reduced over the last two years. 800 from a total 5000 medicines, meaning 16 percent of drug prices have been reduced using the benchmark framework. Today I believe and hope that this price cut will allow for improved access to treatments and medicines. Concerning all new innovative products that will be launched, the government decree of June 2014 ensures that these products will again follow the benchmark, but this time they will not take the average of the six countries, but the lowest.

One roadblock that remains for the authorities to improve access to medicine remains the price of generics. Indeed, generics have not been impacted by the price decree. While innovative treatments have the lowest prices globally, generics’ price in Morocco is within the most expensive compared to other markets.



Now that the lowering of prices has taken place, what do you see as the next steps?

It must be said that the price decree hurt many laboratories, in particular the MNCs, and we are now waiting for accompanying measures and have already discussed this with the ministry. Indeed the price cut is a laudable cause but now when one speaks of access to medicines, one has to ensure that the medicines are available on the Moroccan market. When you ask what my priorities are as president of MIS, it is very clear that access to medicines comes first on the list. The issue of AMM (*autorisation de mise sur le marché*) is a vitally important for us so that Moroccan citizens can have access to treatments and medicines. Equally, good promotional practices, ethics, are essential if Morocco is to fulfil its ambition of becoming the gateway to Africa.

I remain optimistic for Morocco. If I were Moroccan I would be proud to have ministers who have pursued courageous reforms. Another step forward for Morocco is the memorandum signed by the OPMIC with the European Patent Office (EPO), taking effect from 1st March, which is a good step forward for collaboration with EU and will give an added impetus to innovation and R&D.

However, I am concerned about some of the public debate in the media surrounding the EPO agreement. The focus on protectionism in the national debate is a concern and it is critical that the authorities reassure the MNCs of the importance that they attach to stability and innovation.

In your role as DG for Pfizer Maroc, what is your corporate perspective on the Moroccan market?

Pfizer is at the ideal size to have a real impact on the Moroccan market, and is one of the few MNCs to maintain a production plant in Morocco. The El Jadida Plant produces over 80 percent of the Moroccan market needs and we even had the honour of the king come to visit the plant in 1972. In terms of perspectives, you can never be sure, but we have recently invested in a modern new office here in Casablanca and the El Jadida plant is also scheduled for extension in the very short term. Such an act demonstrates our attachment to Morocco, a market which we consider to be very important as we were one of the first MNCs to be present in the country.

A company is not only its infrastructure, but also its people. How would you rate the quality of HR in Morocco?

Morocco is a country with many impressive talents. The expertise is already here, and in terms of education Morocco is performing extremely well. If I look at my team, I have no problem finding top talents. I am particularly proud to say that Pfizer Morocco is often a platform for talent development, and we have already sent some of our top talents to take on regional positions. Last but not least, Morocco is internally often considered as a center of excellence and Innovation and we are often a country where pilot programs are established. I am also very proud to say Pfizer has received from the minister of labour the award for best place to work in for the pharmaceutical field and fourth best overall in Morocco for 2014, we do believe that the work environment is an important factor in our success.

And finally what would be your perspective on the next five years?

I am very confident that Morocco will achieve its ambitions with regards to the African dimension. And overall, the direction taken today by the minister of health and also by the minister of industry is promising. It is true that a vision and implementation are two separate things, yet I would say that the signs are positive. Morocco also has an advantage given its geography as well its stability, both political and economic. The Kingdom is today very open and outwards looking. Today I believe, the main challenge will be not to give in the protectionist temptation, butff continue ensuring stability and access to innovation. If we can do this then I think we can succeed in establishing ourselves as the gateway to Africa.

In terms of Pfizer, the company today is doing well and I hope that by 2020 the same will be true. My main goal for 2020 is to ensure that all treatments in the pipeline today will become accessible. If we attain this, we will have achieved our mission to the Moroccan population.

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