

Interview: Hamouda Zaouia - Regional Manager Africa, Middle East and Turkey; Khaled Laouiti - General Manager Tunisia, Libya and sub-Saharan Africa, Pierre Fabre



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Hamouda Zaouia, regional manager Africa, Middle East and Turkey, and Khaled Laouiti, general manager Tunisia, Libya and sub-Saharan Africa, stress the important strategic position the African continent has for Pierre Fabre. They describe the company's approach when tailoring its portfolio to truly target the needs of patients and Pierre Fabre's commitments to ensuring patient access to its medicines and the availability of a highly-educated workforce on the continent.

What is the strategic importance of Africa in Pierre Fabre's global organization and what is the scope of its presence in the region?

Hamouda Zaouia (HZ): As regional manager, I have Africa, the MENA region and Turkey under my management; a truly strategic region for Pierre Fabre. Our somewhat complex structure revolves around affiliates in Turkey, Algeria, Morocco and South Africa with regional headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon and in Tunisia from where Khaled Laouiti manages 25 countries. While Algeria is our first market in terms of revenues, we are rapidly expanding our presence in the whole of the region, from Iran to sub-Saharan Africa where we are already well-established in the French speaking countries. In most of these countries we are among the top five players in healthcare, on the whole

of sub-Saharan Africa we occupy the place of fourth largest player in terms of average revenue, starting out from the 40th position 15 years ago.

We hold great expectations for the region. The late M. Pierre Fabre himself was very much involved in the development of the company he founded on the African continent. Himself a pharmacist, he had the vision to develop pharmacies in Africa, and today those that can be found in sub-Saharan Africa are excellent, in no small parts thanks to Pierre Fabre. Although only three percent of Pierre Fabre's employees work in Africa today, our strategic plan for Africa, launched in 2000, will see this percentage rise as a consequence of our increased focus on the emerging economies in the market.

Khaled Laouiti (KL): This focus forces us to face challenges on an economic as well as managerial level as our ability to adapt to different markets needs to be proven once more. It was easier to leverage on our close cultural proximity as a French company in francophone Africa than in our new ventures into more and more English-speaking countries. It is always important to bear in mind that there is no such thing as "one Africa".

Tunisia, where we have been growing at two to three times the growth of the market and have multiplied our revenues by three has been the hub for the region since 2003.

Pierre Fabre has set itself a "2018 pathway plan". What axes of this plan are you aiming to implement in Africa in the near future?

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HZ: Ambition is something you work on; thus, we have clear objectives in order to reach our goals. We divide our work by geographic zone and therapeutic area. Africa is a continent constantly shifting, therefore, successfully addressing the risks and opportunities—the former often being more important here— present requires us to adapt to each country while of course remaining compliant with our ethical standards and always keeping the wellbeing of the patient in mind. External factors will for sure impact our development, but by fostering the right agility and reactivity we will succeed in tackling challenges and ultimately see our ambitions fulfilled.

KL: Pierre Fabre also has a role in the development of employment on the African continent. I personally am dedicated to drive the development of new jobs within the pharmaceutical industry, mainly in the sector of digital expansion related activities. As a company, we wish to ensure sustainability and to be recognized as one of the best employers in order to reinforce our legitimacy on the continent.

In parallel, we focus on bringing the needed molecules—even those we do not originally own in our portfolio—to the African patients.

How is your portfolio adapted to the needs of the continent?

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KL: Thanks to our longstanding strategy of diversification, we are able to cater to the geopolitical conditions in Africa, while investigating potential areas of development outside the existing product portfolio for sub-Saharan Africa. In line with the aforementioned strategy, we forged a partnership with Sigma-Tau (now ALFA SIGMA) in 2015, enabling us to promote and distribute their anti-malarial Eurartesim® in 32 countries in Africa. The market authorizations are well underway, the last in date to be approved being Zambia. For us the equation is simple: if 500,000 people still die of malaria each year, then we cannot claim to be a dedicated and serious partner to Africa if we do not tackle this disease. In this, we know we have the full support of our global headquarters.

HZ: Indeed, Eurartesim® was the perfect fit for us as it allows us to address the needs of hundreds of thousands of people whose lives are at stake. By leveraging on pharmacies and by means of medical information we try to guarantee access to the product.

What drove Pierre Fabre to decide upon Tunisia as its regional headquarter for Sub-Saharan Africa?

HZ: Tunisia presented considerable advantages when we took the decision in 2003, such as a stable economic situation and a highly qualified workforce. Tunisia was also our largest market in Africa at the time, the regulations were favorable and it is the doorway to a sizeable market with its close neighbors and proximity to the sub-Saharan region. In 2009, we installed our manufacturing plant in the country, a site we are still heavily investing in and will continue to do so in the future, aiming for it to cover more of the local and ultimately sub-Saharan demand. We want to maintain our international character while fulfilling our ambitions as a local player. In Tunisia, we are currently active with our pharmaceutical portfolio which encompasses dermatology, consumer health and oncology products. Within the near future we aim to considerably augment our exports from Tunisia.

What challenges do you face as area general managers today?

KL: A challenge Africa is facing today is that of the black market on which drugs and counterfeit drugs are being traded. One of the reasons for this black market is a lack of pharmacies in rural areas. For some patients, the black market is the only place where they can access medication.

What would you define as the key success factors in a market like Tunisia?

HZ: I think partnerships are of primary importance, especially those built between local and multinational companies. We have for instance a long-lasting collaboration with the SIPHAT, which has been highly beneficial for both parties involved. The local player receives a knowledge and technology transfer and the multinational can leverage on new output opportunities. Pierre Fabre believes in alliances; we are part of both SEPHIRE and the CNIP (National Pharmaceutical Industry Association) and work with five different Tunisian operators in total. Living alone is something that does not work out.

KL: Adaptability is key. As mentioned before, Africa encompasses over 50 countries, all presenting a very complex and rich set of particularities. Mastering the art of tailoring a portfolio and management style to each is what ensures success in the end. Pierre Fabre invests in the future, in the creation of human and material resources for the betterment of healthcare access and education. The digital dimension will be key for both aspects of development we aim for. A sound pharmacoeconomic approach equally allows not only for the certainty to have a portfolio which answers the real needs of the market, but for a solid economic base from which to grow.

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