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nigeria Pharma Manufacturers' EXPO
CaPhEx CENTRAL ASIA PHARMA EXPO

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OUR BUREAU, MUMBAI

THE 8th Nigeria Pharma Manufacturers' Expo (NPME) 2026 is set to open its doors on September 28–29 at the Harbour Point Event Centre, Victoria Island, Lagos. Positioned as West and Central Africa's largest complete pharma manufacturing exhibition, NPME 2026 arrives at a critical juncture for the region's healthcare and pharmaceutical ecosystem. Alongside the concurrent Nigeria Lab Expo, the event promises to be a defining platform for localization, technology transfer, and regulatory engagement.

Africa's long-term demand

Africa offers strong long-term demand for affordable medicines. Over the longer term, greater participation in the region can also help Indian companies build local partnerships, strengthen distribution networks, and move towards more value-added product segments. "Africa is not a

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Localization reshaping pharma industry across Africa and Central Asia

DR SANJAY AGRAWAL

THE global pharmaceutical industry is entering a new phase- one in which the ability to manufacture medicines locally is becoming as important as the ability to develop them. Across markets, governments and industry leaders are reassessing traditional supply-chain models that depend heavily on a limited number of international manufacturing centres.

This shift is giving rise to a powerful new industry priority: localization.

From Africa to Central Asia, countries are seeking to strengthen domestic pharmaceutical capabilities, attract investment, develop local talent and build resilient healthcare supply chains. Localization is no longer simply about replacing imports. It is increasingly about creating sustainable ecosystems that bring together manufacturing, research and development, technology, regulation and investment.

A global shift towards localization

The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global pharmaceutical supply chains. Disruptions in manufacturing, transportation and international trade highlighted the risks associated with excessive dependence on external suppliers for medicines, APIs, medical technologies and critical healthcare products.

Since then, supply-chain resilience and pharmaceutical sovereignty have become strategic priorities for governments worldwide. Countries are encouraging local manufacturing not only to secure essential medicines but also to develop domestic industrial capabilities.

Localization can provide several advantages. It can reduce exposure to international supply disruptions, shorten supply chains and improve access to essential medicines. More importantly, it can create opportunities for local companies, research institutions and entrepreneurs to participate in the pharmaceutical value chain.

For emerging markets, localization also offers an opportunity to move beyond being primarily importers and become manufacturers, innovators and exporters.

Nigeria: Building stronger local pharmaceutical base

Nigeria represents one of the most significant pharmaceutical markets in Africa, supported by its large population and growing demand for healthcare products. Yet the country has historically depended substantially on imported medicines and pharmaceutical raw materials.

This dependence has strengthened the case for expanding local pharmaceutical manufacturing. Building domestic capacity can improve medicine availability, reduce exposure to international supply-chain disruptions and create new opportunities for Nigerian businesses.

The ambition is increasingly visible across the country's pharmaceutical ecosystem. Industry platforms such as Nigeria Pharma Expo provide an important forum for manufacturers, distributors, technology providers, policymakers and investors to exchange ideas and explore opportunities around local production.

Such platforms are particularly important because localization requires more than manufacturing facilities. It requires access to technology, financing, skilled manpower, quality systems, regulatory expertise and reliable infrastructure.

For MSMEs and startups, this transformation could be especially significant. Smaller businesses can play an important role in contract manufacturing, pharmaceutical packaging, distribution, specialised ingredients, digital healthcare and technology-enabled manufacturing. With the right ecosystem of financing, mentorship, infrastructure and regulatory support, local enterprises can gradually scale and become part of larger pharmaceutical supply chains.

Nigeria's localization journey therefore represents not only a healthcare objective but also an industrial and economic opportunity.

Africa's broader Localization outlook

Nigeria's experience reflects a much larger trend across Africa.

The continent has significant pharmaceutical demand but continues to face challenges in manufacturing capacity, infrastructure, financing, regulatory complexity and access to advanced technologies. Many African countries remain dependent on imported medicines, APIs and other healthcare products.

Localization offers a potential pathway towards greater self-sufficiency and pharmaceutical sovereignty.

However, building pharmaceutical manufacturing capabilities in Africa cannot be achieved overnight. Manufacturing medicines requires sophisticated facilities, quality-control systems, specialised equipment, skilled professionals and dependable supply chains.

Regulatory alignment is another important consideration. Different national regulatory requirements can increase the complexity and cost of operating across multiple African markets. Greater harmonization can make it easier for manufacturers to scale

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production and distribute products across borders.

Regional initiatives aimed at strengthening pharmaceutical manufacturing, improving regulatory cooperation and encouraging investment are therefore increasingly important. The development of regional supply chains can allow countries to specialise in particular products while collectively building a stronger continental pharmaceutical ecosystem.

The objective should not necessarily be for every country to manufacture everything. Instead, Africa can develop interconnected regional manufacturing capabilities, supported by efficient trade and harmonized regulatory systems.

Uzbekistan: Emerging hub connecting East and West

While Africa is strengthening its localization agenda, Central Asia is also emerging as an increasingly interesting pharmaceutical region.

At the centre of this transformation is Uzbekistan, whose geographic position gives it strategic importance between major markets in Asia and Europe. Its location creates opportunities for the country to function not only as a domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing base but also as a bridge connecting different markets.

Uzbekistan's pharmaceutical sector has been attracting increasing attention from manufacturers, investors and technology providers. The development of local production, technology partnerships and international collaboration could strengthen the country's position within regional pharmaceutical supply chains.

Platforms such as Caphex can play a valuable role in bringing together industry stakeholders, investors, manufacturers and regulatory participants. Such platforms create opportunities for collaboration and can support discussions around investment, technology transfer, market access and regulatory harmonization.

The potential extends beyond Uzbekistan itself. Joint ventures between international pharmaceutical companies and Central Asian manufacturers could facilitate the transfer of manufacturing technologies and technical expertise. Local partnerships can also help international companies understand regional markets while providing Central Asian manufacturers with access to global capabilities.

This could gradually position Central Asia as an important pharmaceutical corridor between East and West.

CIS market integration

The broader CIS market adds another dimension to Central Asia's pharmaceutical potential.

The Commonwealth of Independent States brings together markets with established economic, cultural and historical connections. Shared or closely aligned regulatory practices in parts of the region can provide pharmaceutical companies with opportunities to develop regional strategies rather than approaching every market as an entirely separate destination.

For manufacturers, localization within one strategically positioned market can potentially support distribution into neighbouring markets, provided regulatory and market-access requirements are met.

This creates an attractive proposition for pharmaceutical companies: establish manufacturing or packaging capabilities locally, develop partnerships with regional companies and use the resulting platform to access a broader market.

Regulatory harmonization will remain critical. Consistent standards can reduce duplication, facilitate product registration and make regional expansion more efficient.

As Central Asian countries deepen their pharmaceutical capabilities, CIS integration can therefore strengthen their role in global supply chains while giving international companies a more structured route into the region.

Sovereignty as a driver of innovation

The strongest argument for localization goes beyond reducing imports.

Pharmaceutical sovereignty is ultimately about the ability to respond to local healthcare needs.

A country with domestic manufacturing and research capabilities has greater flexibility in responding to shortages, changing disease patterns and public-health priorities. Local production can also encourage the development of products better suited to regional healthcare requirements.

Localization can stimulate innovation by creating ecosystems in which manufacturers, universities, technology companies, startups and research institutions work together.

This is particularly relevant for emerging markets. Instead of relying entirely on established global pharmaceutical companies for technology and products, local ecosystems can develop their own capabilities in formulation, biotechnology, digital health, manufacturing automation and pharmaceutical research.

The objective is not to isolate domestic markets from global industry. Rather, it is to create strong local capabilities that can participate confidently in global partnerships.

Policy and industry collaboration

Successful localization requires close cooperation between governments and industry.

Government policy can provide the foundation through investment incentives, infrastructure development, financing mechanisms, procurement policies and regulatory reforms. Shared manufacturing infrastructure can reduce the initial capital burden for smaller companies, while specialized industrial clusters can create efficiencies across the pharmaceutical value chain.

Regulatory alignment is equally important. Efficient approval processes, internationally recognised quality standards and predictable regulatory frameworks can make local manufacturing more attractive to investors.

Industry, meanwhile, must contribute through technology, investment, training and partnerships.

Collaboration between multinational companies and local manufacturers can accelerate technology transfer and build technical capabilities. Partnerships between large pharmaceutical companies and MSMEs can also create opportunities for smaller businesses to become suppliers within larger manufacturing ecosystems.

The success of localization will therefore depend on an ecosystem approach, rather than isolated investments in individual factories.

From dependency to sovereignty

Africa and Central Asia are at different stages of pharmaceutical development, but they share a common opportunity.

Nigeria is seeking to strengthen its domestic manufacturing capabilities and reduce vulnerability to imports. Across Africa, regional cooperation can help overcome fragmented markets and infrastructure limitations. Uzbekistan is emerging as a strategically positioned manufacturing and collaboration hub, while broader CIS integration can provide Central Asian companies with access to interconnected regional markets.

Together, these developments point towards a fundamental transformation in the global pharmaceutical landscape.

The future of pharma will not be defined solely by a handful of global manufacturing centres. Instead, a more distributed network of regional pharmaceutical ecosystems is likely to emerge- each combining local manufacturing, international investment, technology partnerships, research and regulatory cooperation.

Localization is therefore becoming more than an industrial strategy. It is a pathway towards resilience, sovereignty and innovation.

For Africa, Nigeria, Uzbekistan and the wider CIS region, the opportunity is clear: move from being predominantly dependent on global pharmaceutical supply chains to becoming active contributors to them.

The journey from dependency to sovereignty has begun. And as local manufacturing, regional integration and international collaboration accelerate, these emerging pharmaceutical regions could play an increasingly influential role in shaping the next chapter of global healthcare.

(The author is a leading pharmaceutical consultant and editor-in-chief of IJMToady.)