

mRNA Tech transfer hub beneficiaries announced

Kenya, Nigeria, Tunisia, Senegal and Egypt have been announced as the first "spokes" or beneficiaries to receive the technology to produce their own mRNA vaccines.



Source: [Pexels](#)

The countries will receive the technology from the World Health Organisation (WHO) supported mRNA Technology Transfer Hub based in South Africa.

This was announced in a joint press conference with President Cyril Ramaphosa, the WHO, the European Council and the French Presidency on the sidelines of the AU-EU Summit.

The mRNA Technology Transfer Hub is aimed at developing technologies and vaccines which could change the face of healthcare on the African continent.

WHO's Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus said the hub is already bearing fruit and the spoke countries are now expected to benefit from technology and knowledge sharing.

"It has produced its own mRNA vaccine based on publicly available information about the composition of an existing vaccine. We expect clinical trials to start...this year with approval expected in 2024.

"We expect the benefits of this initiative will extend far beyond Covid-19 by creating a platform for vaccines against other diseases including malaria, tuberculosis and even cancer. So this is a strategic investment not just for Covid-19 but for all the major health problems that we face. The hub is not just for South Africa, but for Africa and the whole world because the spokes will be distributed all over the world," he said.

President Ramaphosa said although the transfer of technologies from the hub is a significant step for African vaccine production, intellectual property (IP) rights challenges continue to challenge the work done at the hub.

The President reiterated his long standing call for the waiver of TRIPS agreements which prohibit self-manufacturing of certain vaccines based on the intellectual property (IP) rights placed on the technology and information needed to do so.

"Governments that are really serious about vaccine access...should ensure that we approve the Trips waiver as we have put forward rather than hide behind IP [and] the profitability of the originators.

"We are facing a global pandemic that will stay with us for a long time and all that has been asked for is that Trips waiver should be done within a set period of time so as to enable those countries that do not have easy access to vaccines to have access to vaccines. We are talking about the lives of hundreds of millions of people rather than the profitability of the few companies," he said.

President Ramaphosa emphasised that while vaccine donations from other countries remain "appreciated" on the continent, African countries want to build its own resources and capacity in this regard.

"It is not acceptable that Africa is consistently at the back of the queue in relation to access to medicines. While we appreciate donations, they are not a sustainable way or mechanism to build resilience. Help to empower us. Let us tackle obstacles together and let us demonstrate to the world that Africa has the ability, the scientists and industries to provide the vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics needed to manage African health," he said.

The President said African scientists and other healthcare practitioners are "willing, ready and prepared to work for their continent" and should be unleashed.

"All we need to do at this level is to do the Trips waiver, to empower them and to follow in the lead of the WHO and give them that energy and oxygen so that they can surge forward and do wonders for this continent."

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