

WHO project on improving access to medicines in developing countries through local production and related technology transfer

This project is being carried out in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development and with funding by the European Union.

The Global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property

In May 2008, the World Health Assembly adopted the global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property. The global strategy was a landmark agreement, as it aims to improve treatment for poverty-related and neglected diseases disproportionately affecting developing countries, both by simultaneously stimulating innovation to find new products for these diseases, and by improving availability, affordability, access and acceptability of existing products.

Among other areas, the global strategy highlights the need to build and improve innovative capacity in developing countries (element 3) and to facilitate the transfer of health-related technology (element 4).

Health-related technology transfer for innovation and local production

Implementing the global strategy on technology transfer for innovation, as well as for local production of pharmaceuticals, vaccines and diagnostics may contribute to sustainable and long-term solutions to the challenge of health innovation and access in developing countries. Such types of technology transfer have been credited with the potential to build health security, increase reliability of supply, decrease reliance on imports, lead to lower prices and encourage development and production that is more suitable for the respective health needs of regions. At the same time, these endeavours have raised a number of questions such as those relating to:

- which types of technology for applied research on medical products are in short supply in developing countries, particularly with respect to the adaptation of health technologies to the local context and for facilitating local production;
- the feasibility of local production in any given country;
- the basic conditions for business, such as the availability of skilled workers, economic and political stability, regulatory environment, market size, infrastructure, natural resources and transport;
- stages of the production process that may take place in a particular developing country or region;
- possible ownership arrangements, such as local public sector entities, a local subsidiary of a multinational company or a joint venture between a local firm and foreign firm; and
- various other factors, including: design and construction of facilities; selection of equipment; control over quality and purity of inputs; environmental controls; training and supervision of personnel involved; supply chain management systems; and third party verification of quality.

¹ For purposes of this project, medical products includes pharmaceuticals, vaccines and diagnostics.

Project on local production and related technology transfer

WHO, in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), and with funding by the European Union, is undertaking a project on improving access to medical products in developing countries through local production and related technology transfer. The project involves identifying the main challenges and obstacles of local production in developing countries and providing evidence-based recommendations on their feasibility and sustainability. More specifically, the project has initiated four parallel research activities:

1. Stakeholder analysis

This activity will involve a broad interview process covering relevant stakeholders involved in transfer of technology for local production, such as medical professionals, public and private research institutions, international and regional organizations, government and non-government providers of health services, producers (originator and generic, foreign and domestic), government ministries, regulators, enterprises involved in finance of production and procurement (public and private), non-governmental interest groups and others.

2. Trends survey

The project seeks to determine the current state of activities intended to transfer technology for local production. This is to be accomplished through a combination of desk research and interviews with suppliers and recipients of relevant technologies, as well as others with interests in the process.

3. Case studies

The case studies are to be undertaken in different regions, and include transfer of technology and local production projects with different characteristics. These different characteristics may include, for example: the geographic location of the production facility; the public or private character of the investment and the corporate form of the arrangement; the type of product involved; and the source of technologies. The objective is to clarify the drivers of the decision to produce locally, and to inform the methodology and recommendations of the project based upon direct experience.

4. Stakeholder workshops

Stakeholders identified with respect to transfer of technology for local production and will be brought together in a series of inter-regional workshops intended to gather their views and experiences and clarify the key prerequisites for these activities.

Over two years, the project will identify perceived obstacles to acquiring/developing technology and enabling local production, as well as mechanisms for overcoming such obstacles.

Several project outputs are foreseen, including a publication on trends in health-related technology transfer and local production, case studies, a final report and a methodology to help guide future work in these areas. These findings will be made available in early 2011.

For more information:

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