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Thought Leadership

Africa's Journey Towards Universal Health Coverage and Sustainable Health Security:

Stretching the Ambition of *Gavi LEAP 6.0*

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Stretching the Ambition of *Gavi LEAP 6.0*

Africa's Journey Towards Universal Health Coverage and Sustainable Health Security:

The *Introduction*

Africa accounts for nearly 18% of the world's population but produces only a fraction of the vaccines and health technologies it consumes. According to WHO Africa, countries in the region import approximately 99% of vaccines and between 70% and 100% of finished pharmaceutical products, underscoring the continent's continued dependence on external suppliers.

As donor financing landscapes shift and health threats become increasingly complex, Africa faces a defining question: can it build a self-sustaining health security architecture capable of delivering Universal Health Coverage (UHC)?

As Africa advances toward the aspirations of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the twin goals of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and sustainable health security have never been more urgent. The challenge is substantial. WHO estimates that the African Region's UHC Service Coverage Index stood at 44 in 2021, indicating that less than half of the population accessed the health services they needed.

Discussions at the 4th International Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA 2025) in Durban, South Africa, underscored a growing consensus among policymakers, public health leaders, development partners, and innovators: Africa's future health resilience will depend less on external support and more on its ability to build self-sustaining, locally driven health systems.

The conference highlighted critical priorities including sustainable health financing, health systems strengthening, local manufacturing, and epidemic preparedness.

These priorities align strongly with Gavi's Phase 6 Strategy (LEAP 6.0), which signals a shift from donor-dependent health programming toward country-led, resilient, and innovation-enabled health systems.

At the heart of this transformation lies a powerful convergence of Engineering, Artificial Intelligence, and Data (EAID), strengthened primary healthcare systems, and empowered community health workforces. Together, these pillars offer Africa an unprecedented opportunity to build health systems that are equitable, responsive, and capable of protecting populations against future health threats.

Key Insight

99%

The approximate number of vaccines imported by African countries.

– The World Health Organisation

Gavi LEAP 6.0:

A New Era of Country Ownership

Gavi's LEAP 6.0 Strategy for 2026-2030 represents more than an immunization framework. It reflects a broader vision for sustainable health security anchored in national ownership, equity, innovation, and long-term resilience.

Unlike earlier phases that focused primarily on expanding vaccine coverage through development assistance, LEAP 6.0 emphasizes a "Country First" approach. This model recognizes that sustainable progress requires governments to define solutions that reflect local realities, priorities, and capacities. The strategy encourages countries to strengthen domestic financing mechanisms, improve governance systems, and invest in the institutional capabilities required to independently manage and deliver health services.

For Africa, this transition presents an opportunity to redefine health sovereignty. Health sovereignty extends beyond vaccine access. It encompasses the ability to research, innovate, manufacture, regulate, procure, and deliver healthcare solutions across the continent.

2040

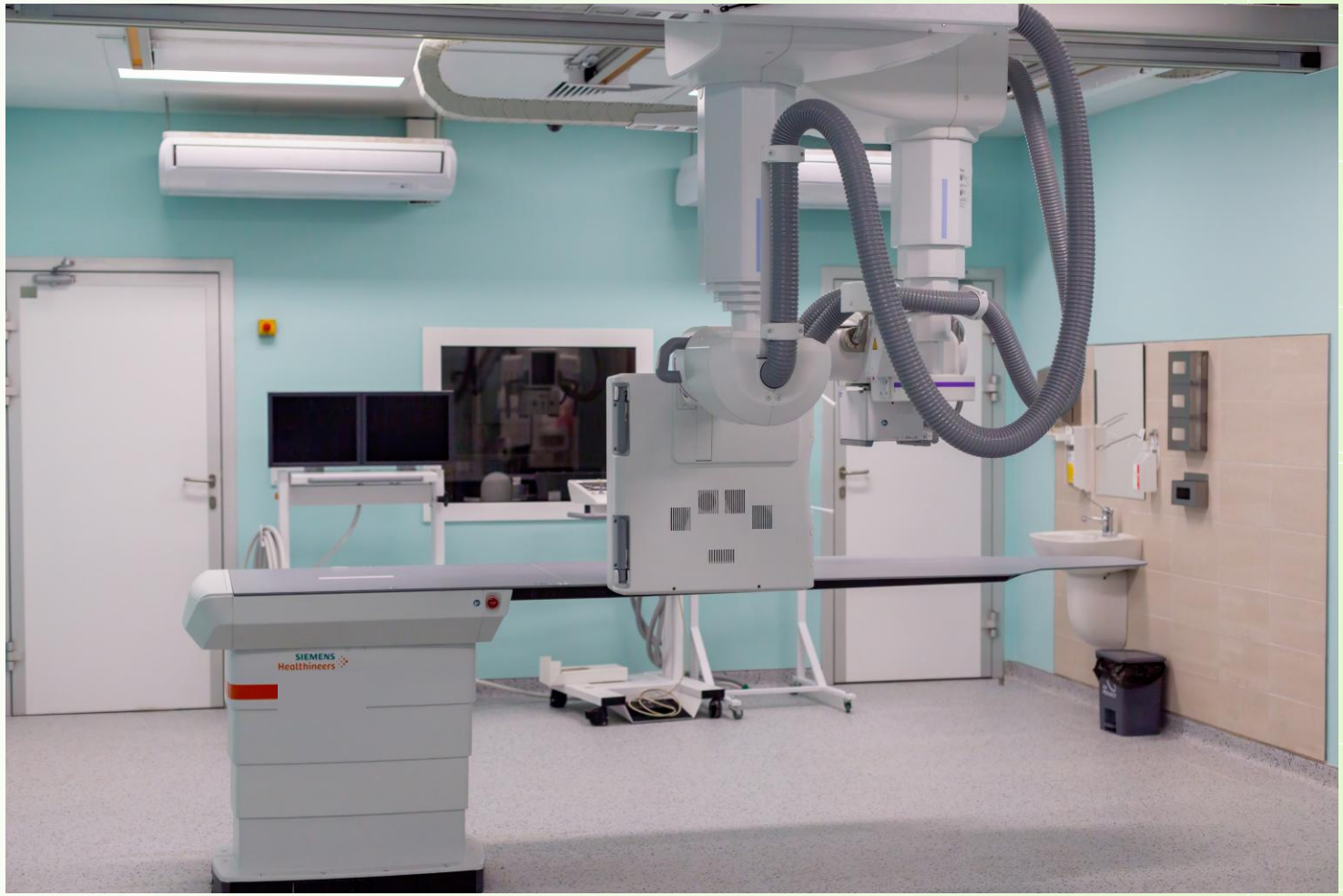
The African Union’s target year for producing 60% of Africa’s vaccine needs locally...

Achieving this vision requires stronger collaboration between academia, industry, governments, and innovators, while fostering ecosystems that support local manufacturing, scientific research, and technological advancement.

The African Union has set an ambitious target of producing 60% of Africa's vaccine needs locally by 2040, up from approximately 1% today. Achieving this ambition will require coordinated investments across manufacturing, regulation, workforce development, and supply chains.

The success of LEAP 6.0 will ultimately depend on Africa's ability to transform from being predominantly a consumer of health innovations into a producer of solutions for its own populations and beyond.

01. Engineering, Artificial Intelligence, and Data: *Catalysts for Health Security*



The future of health security in Africa will depend on how effectively countries harness engineering, artificial intelligence, and data-driven decision-making.

Engineering Solutions for Resilient Health Systems

Engineering innovation is becoming a cornerstone of healthcare transformation across Africa. Biomedical engineering has expanded access to diagnostic technologies, laboratory systems, and medical devices tailored to local conditions and resource constraints.

Innovations such as solar-powered cold chain systems, mobile laboratories, telemedicine infrastructure, and drone-enabled medical deliveries have demonstrated how engineering can bridge healthcare access gaps, particularly in hard-to-reach communities.

> ***"As climate change, urbanization, and emerging disease threats continue to challenge health systems, engineering solutions will remain essential…***

Countries including Rwanda and Ghana have shown how innovative logistics solutions can improve the timely delivery of vaccines, medicines, and laboratory samples. As climate change, urbanization, and emerging disease threats continue to challenge health systems, engineering solutions will remain essential in building resilient healthcare infrastructure capable of responding to future public health emergencies.

02. *Artificial Intelligence and Predictive Public Health*

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly reshaping the health landscape. From disease surveillance and outbreak prediction to diagnostics and resource optimization, AI offers powerful tools for improving health outcomes and preparedness. The lessons from COVID-19 demonstrated the value of digital platforms and real-time analytics in monitoring disease trends and coordinating responses. Looking ahead, AI can strengthen epidemic preparedness through:

01 **Predictive outbreak modelling and early-warning systems**

02 **Vaccine demand forecasting**

03 **Supply chain optimization**

04 **Genomic surveillance and analysis**

05 **Clinical decision-support tools**

06 **Digital assistants for Community Health Workers**

07 **Targeted interventions for vulnerable populations**

These capabilities can help governments move from reactive crisis response to proactive health risk management. However, realizing these benefits requires deliberate investments in digital infrastructure, workforce development, ethical governance, and regulatory frameworks to ensure AI solutions are safe, inclusive, and equitable.

03. *The Strategic Value of Data:*

Reliable and interoperable data systems are fundamental to both UHC and health security.

High-quality data supports evidence-based policymaking, resource allocation, disease surveillance, program monitoring, and accountability.

Many African countries have significantly expanded the use of digital health technologies, including electronic medical records, DHIS2 platforms, and mobile health solutions. Nevertheless, fragmented systems, limited interoperability, weak data governance, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities continue to undermine the full potential of digital transformation.

The next phase of Africa's health journey must prioritize integrated digital ecosystems that provide real-time visibility into population health trends while safeguarding privacy and data security.

Progress Worth Celebrating

Despite persistent challenges, Africa has made remarkable progress in advancing health outcomes over the past two decades.

Immunisation programmes supported by Gavi and other global partners have dramatically reduced the burden of vaccine-preventable diseases. Millions of children now have access to life-saving vaccines against measles, polio, pneumococcal disease, and HPV-related illnesses.

The continent has also witnessed significant advances in digital health adoption. Countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa have strengthened disease surveillance systems and improved public health decision-making through digital reporting platforms and electronic health records.

Equally important has been the expansion of Primary Health Care (PHC). Community Health Workers (CHWs) continue to demonstrate that locally embedded healthcare models can effectively improve maternal and child health outcomes while increasing access to essential services in underserved communities.

However, the next frontier is not merely deploying CHWs but ensuring they are adequately recruited, trained, digitally enabled, compensated, supervised, and fully integrated into national health systems.

The establishment of Africa CDC has further strengthened continental coordination in disease surveillance, laboratory networks, genomic sequencing, and emergency response planning.

In addition, several African countries have accelerated investments in pharmaceutical and vaccine manufacturing following the COVID-19 pandemic. South Africa, Rwanda, Senegal, Egypt, and other countries are positioning themselves as key contributors to Africa's future health sovereignty.

The Critical Challenges Ahead

The path toward self-reliance remains complex.

First, donor dependency continues to present significant sustainability risks. Many immunization programs, disease surveillance initiatives, and laboratory systems still rely heavily on external financing.

Second, digital transformation remains uneven. Limited broadband connectivity, unreliable electricity, and fragmented information systems constrain the adoption of advanced technologies and AI-powered solutions.

Third, workforce shortages threaten progress. WHO estimates that Africa remains significantly understaffed and previously projected a health workforce shortage of approximately **6.1 million health workers by 2030,** highlighting the urgent need for investments in STEM education, workforce development, and research capacity.

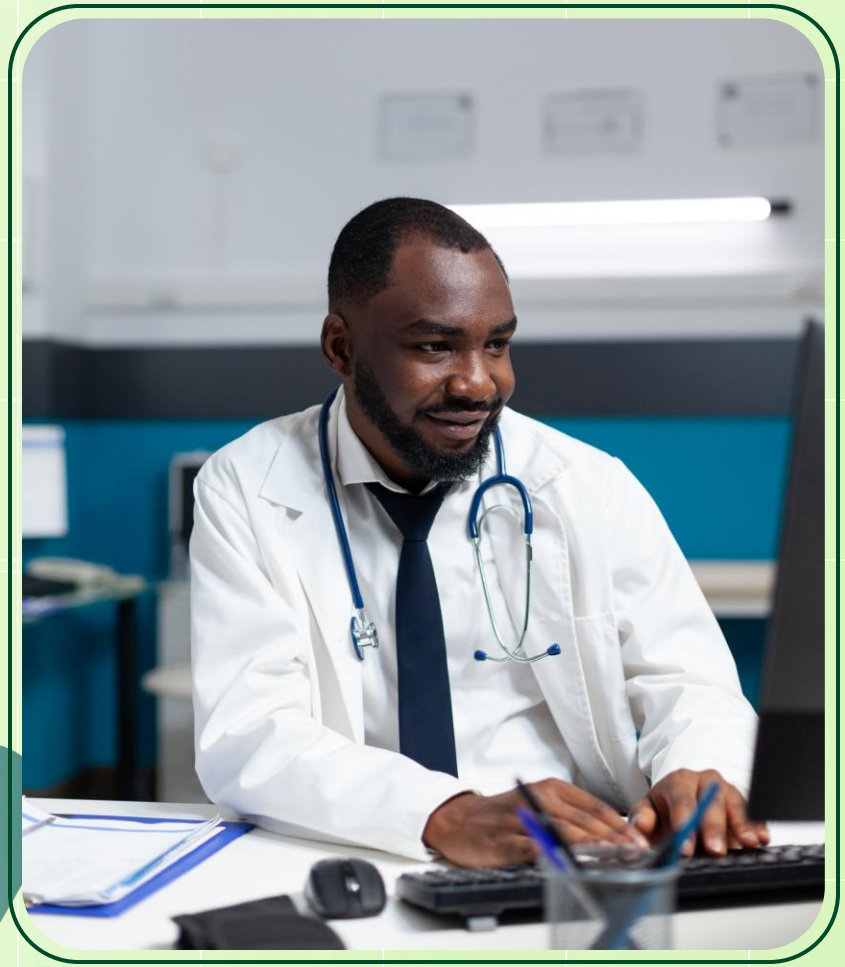
6.1 *Million*	*health workers by 2030*

Data governance represents another growing concern. As health systems become increasingly digitized, governments must establish robust legal, ethical, and cybersecurity frameworks to protect sensitive data and maintain public trust.

Finally, local manufacturing capacity remains insufficient. Continued dependence on imported vaccines, medicines, and health technologies leaves countries vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions during crises.

A Strategic Opportunity for Africa

While the barriers are real, Africa has never been better positioned to shape its own health future. The continent's youthful population, expanding innovation ecosystems, and growing commitment to regional integration provide a strong foundation for transformative change. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers an opportunity to strengthen regional pharmaceutical markets, harmonize regulations, and build resilient supply chains. Drawing from emerging lessons across health system transformation initiatives, five imperatives stand out:



Five Imperatives for African Health Sovereignty

1. **Invest in local pharmaceutical and vaccine manufacturing** to strengthen health sovereignty and reduce import dependency.
2. **Scale digital health and AI solutions** that improve surveillance, diagnostics, forecasting, and health service delivery.
3. **Strengthen primary healthcare systems** through empowered and adequately supported Community Health Workers.
4. **Build sustainable financing mechanisms** that reduce dependence on external funding and improve long-term resilience.
5. **Establish enabling regulatory environments** that accelerate innovation while protecting public safety, privacy, and trust.

A Deloitte Perspective:
Turning Ambition into Execution

Across health system strengthening, digital transformation, and public sector modernization efforts, one lesson is increasingly clear: technology alone does not transform outcomes.

Successful health transformation occurs when countries advance five capabilities simultaneously:

- Leadership and governance
- Sustainable financing
- Workforce readiness
- Digital and physical infrastructure
- Data-driven decision-making

Investments in AI, digital health platforms, and local manufacturing will generate the greatest impact when supported by strong institutions, interoperable systems, and a workforce equipped to use them effectively.

The countries most likely to succeed under LEAP 6.0 will be those that treat health security not as a standalone health agenda, but as an integrated national development priority.

The Way Forward

Africa stands at a defining moment in its public health journey. The transition envisioned under Gavi LEAP 6.0 is not merely about sustaining immunization gains. It is about building resilient systems capable of delivering universal healthcare, responding to emerging threats, and advancing health equity for future generations.

Achieving this vision will require bold leadership, strategic investment, and unprecedented collaboration across governments, academia, industry, development partners, and communities.

The convergence of engineering, artificial intelligence, data innovation, and strong primary healthcare offers Africa a unique opportunity to leapfrog traditional development pathways and establish a new model of health security rooted in self-reliance.

The question is no longer whether Africa can achieve Universal Health Coverage and sustainable health security. The question is how quickly the continent can mobilize its collective strengths to make this vision a reality.

> ***Gavi LEAP 6.0 is not merely about sustaining immunization gains. It is about building resilient systems...***

Key *Takeaways*

1. Localize Innovation

Build African-led solutions that respond to local health challenges through research, technology, and entrepreneurship.

2. Expand Genomic Sequencing Capacity

Strengthen surveillance systems to detect and respond rapidly to emerging health threats.

3. Advance Inclusion and Equity Through Primary Health Care

Invest in Community Health Workers as the foundation of accessible and equitable healthcare delivery.

Strengthen the Research-to-Industry Pipeline

Accelerate the translation of scientific discoveries into scalable products, technologies, and services.

4. Remove Regulatory Bottlenecks

Harmonize regulatory processes and protect vulnerable populations through efficient approval pathways.

5. Develop Real-Time Health Intelligence Dashboards

Enable data-driven decision-making through integrated and interoperable digital health systems.

6. Operationalize the One Health Approach

Promote collaboration across human, animal, and environmental health sectors to enhance preparedness and long-term resilience.

The Conversation Continues

The coming decade will determine whether Africa remains predominantly a consumer of global health innovations or emerges as a global producer of solutions.

Gavi LEAP 6.0 provides the framework, but success will ultimately depend on whether governments, industry, academia, and innovators translate ambition into action.

The future of Africa's health security will not be imported. It will be engineered, financed, and led from within the continent.

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