



SpeakUpAfrica.

# ADVOCATING FOR INVESTMENT IN AFRICAN HEALTH INNOVATION AND RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

## *About Speak Up Africa*

We are an African-led, Africa-based organization working with leaders and change-makers in Africa and beyond to solve our continent's pressing sustainable development challenges.

We convene, enable and advocate. Focusing on strategic communications, policy and advocacy, we are dedicated to supporting African leaders and citizens to take an active role in identifying and developing solutions to tackle the challenges facing our continent — including malaria, NTDs, immunization, sanitation, gender equality and global health research and development (R&D).

## *Our approach*

Speak Up Africa is advising government leaders on policies that will support research to solve current and future health threats facing the continent. We are also working to elevate the importance of global health R&D on political agendas, with an eye on securing sustainable, long-term financing for these efforts. To do this, we are enlisting civil society organizations to join us in advocating for more funding and research in the region. Similarly, we are working with

## *About Global Health and Research and Development*

Despite tremendous gains in recent decades in fighting diseases, millions of people still suffer from illnesses for which we still lack the right tools — whether vaccines, diagnostic tests or treatments. We have no vaccine against HIV/AIDS, for example, nor do we have suitable treatment or vaccines to tackle many of the world's neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). Investing in global health R&D is critical to our ability to defeat existing and future threats.

Yet even though Africa accounts for 15% of the global population and 25% of the global disease burden, the region only produces about 2% of the world's research output. The African Union recognizes that for Member States to achieve Agenda 2063, science, technology and innovation must be at the centre of the developmental agenda. Thus, in 2007, African Union member states committed to spending **1% of their GDP on R&D**. Over 15 years later, this commitment has yet to be fulfilled. Furthermore, there are inequalities in accessing innovative technologies. The region's agenda ought to be driven by local health priorities. By investing in and partnering with local, credible experts, Africa can improve its contribution to global health R&D, and therefore contribute to improving the health not only of its citizens, but also of the rest of the world.

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Our specific objectives include:



**Building internal and external capacity of organizations** in Francophone West Africa to advocate for domestic investment in GH R&D



**Supporting advocacy efforts for GH R&D by leveraging global, continental, regional and national platforms** in Francophone markets



**Enhancing advocacy and communications capacity and capability** for trusted African science leaders to share reliable information with African populations on R&D and health innovation



**Supporting the adoption of specific R&D policies** overseeing the operationalization of the AMA and strengthening the pharmaceutical sector in West Africa

## *Our impact at a glance*



**Joined the AMA Treaty Alliance** as a founding member to support the operationalization of the AMA and supported the ratification of the treaty in Senegal



**Launched the first regional working group on R&D**, which aims to provide a platform for key stakeholders to engage in collaborative efforts to advance health R&D across the continent



**Strengthened the capacity of three civil society organizations** to support R&D advocacy activities in Senegal, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire



**Reached 21,350 people** with messages on social media via #AfricanVoicesofScience



**Supported 18 key African scientists and public health specialists** to provide important health information to the media, ranging from the creation of COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and diagnostics, to developing new infectious disease research



**Launched the first Africa Young Innovators for Health Award** in collaboration with the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations IFPMA and awarded three entrepreneurs with financial support worth \$75,000



**Secured 23 pieces of media coverage championing African-led R&D** through the African Voices of Science initiative



**Launched the Women's Innovators Incubator** to address gaps in female-led innovation and awarded three initial prizes

## Examples of our work

### **Amplifying credible voices amid misinformation: The African Voices of Science**

Misinformation around the research and development of new health tools, from vaccines and therapeutics to diagnostics and disease surveillance, could hamper Africa's ability to proactively shape its research agenda. Moreover, misinformation could slow the development and delivery of innovation – impeding clinical trial recruitment and the acceptability and uptake of new tools and measures to prevent, treat and diagnose diseases that hamper development.

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked fear and misinformation globally. Through digital channels, unproven and often misleading information spread through communities, fueling even more anxiety around this disease that drastically altered the world's norms for everyday life.

Speak Up Africa started the African Voices of Science Initiative to provide a platform for trusted African science leaders and health experts to share reliable information about COVID-19 and other research and scientific innovations to address the continent's health concerns.

Ranging from professionals working on communicable diseases to epidemiologists and other sectors in-between, Speak Up Africa worked with 18 scientists to ensure their credible voices were amplified across multiple channels to help dispel inaccurate information and to keep Africans informed about COVID-19 and other health concerns. These scientists were interviewed by multiple media outlets, including BBC Afrique and Jeune Afrique, and generated open public discourse around COVID-19 and other health challenges and solutions facing the continent, including new research on infectious diseases.

Find out more about the initiative [here](#).



## Shedding light on innovative health entrepreneurs: The Africa Young Innovators for Health Award

In 2021, Speak Up Africa and the IFPMA launched the Africa Young Innovators for Health Award as an encouragement to young entrepreneurs in the health sector to develop innovative health projects. Out of 300 applications, 60 were selected, 15 shortlisted and three winners were rewarded for their innovative projects in delivering care and promoting health. The winners from Cameroon, Kenya and Nigeria were awarded:



Financial support worth a total of **US\$75,000**



**Training in media techniques**



**Experts' advice** on intellectual property protection



A three-month **business mentoring** program



**Access to a network of partners** working in the digital, health care and media sectors

Find out more about the award program [here](#).

## Creating spaces for women in health innovation: Women Innovators Incubator Award

The Africa Young Innovators for Health Award received many applications, but only 21% of them were women. Speak Up Africa and IFPMA partnered once again to develop the Women Innovators Incubator Award to address this gender imbalance by focusing solely on women in Africa's health innovation landscape.

The Women Innovators Incubator Award aims to develop the scientific innovation and entrepreneurial capabilities of female health entrepreneurs so that they can take their innovations to the next level. The three winners of the first cohort were from Uganda and Rwanda and were awarded:



A financial grant of **US\$5,000 each**



A three-month **business mentoring** program



**Training in media skills**



**Experts' advice** on intellectual property protection



**Access to a network of experts** and partners working in the fields of digital, health and media



Speak Up Africa launched the award at the Galien Forum in Dakar in 2021, where scientists of the African Voices Initiative called for increased regional scientific cooperation and investment in health care research in response to a rise in misinformation on the continent.

Find out more about the Women Innovators Incubator [here](#).

### **Collaboration to accelerate health innovation: Regional Advocacy Working Group for Global Health R&D**

In 2022, Speak Up Africa created a regional working group comprising of non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic and research institutions, and the private sector to focus on health R&D. The group aims to advance policies to accelerate the creation of new drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, medical devices and other tools to make proper health more accessible for all.

The goal is to spark collaboration that accelerates the R&D of health technologies that address the continent's health challenges, including malaria, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, and other neglected diseases.

### **Supporting the partners as they build systems: African Medicines Agency**

Through the AMA Treaty Alliance, Speak Up Africa contributed to the development of the joint strategy that will support the operationalization of AMA and the creation of a strong agency to ensure Africa is better prepared for current and future pandemics.

Speak Up Africa also worked with Senegal's Head of Committee of Foreign Affairs to move along the ratification process of the AMA Treaty in Senegal.

In addition to working at the national level to support countries as they adjust their regulatory systems to meet AMA standards, Speak Up Africa also supports regional advocacy to encourage the production of vaccines and pharmaceutical products in emerging markets. At the continental level, Speak Up Africa will work with the African Union Commission to support advocacy for ratification of the AMA Treaty, focusing its interventions on Francophone countries that need to ratify and deposit the AMA instrument.

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