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Morocco has become GSK's regional hub thanks to the quality of human capital in the country, explains the company's area director, president and general manager for North Africa, who also comments on the reason why she remains optimistic for the future of Moroccan pharmaceutical industry.

We have heard from the industry that after a very difficult last two years, the worst is now behind us. What do you see as being the remaining challenges?

The last two years were highly challenging for the pharmaceutical industry globally, with the uncertainty and turbulence caused by the implementation of the new pricing system. I believe we have now managed to overcome this hurdle by keeping the patient at the heart of everything we do, ensuring that the supply chain remains open and that the patient is provided with the required treatment at the right time. Still, for future development perspective, we need to recover from the large drop faced during the previous two years where growth was flat and early 2014 pharmaceutical market was declining.

One of the key drivers for sustained growth is expanding access to treatment. Access barrier is limiting for Morocco pharmaceutical development as a country, with only around 40 percent of the population covered by public health insurance and more than 50 percent out of pocket funding.

Government implemented several initiatives to increase access and expand health coverage to a larger portion of the population, by putting in place global healthcare reform. Only expanded access will allow patients benefit from innovative and quality medicine and ensure higher market growth.

Another growth driver is new products introduction in the coming years, helping to address the need for government to offer larger and better treatment choice to patients, and the need for research based pharmaceutical companies to offset for the impact of the price decrease implemented by Government and continue development strategies.

When we met with Mohamed Benali Khoudja, VP and General Manager for GSK Algeria, he mentioned that "without a shadow of doubt Algeria can become a regional hub." What impact will the growth of the Algerian market have on the Moroccan operations of GSK?

Today, I am leading GSK North Africa, based in Morocco, supporting three countries: Morocco, Tunisia and Libya. We are ranked second in pharmaceutical market in both Morocco & Tunisia and GSK is leading the industry in many therapeutic areas: vaccines, anti-infective and respiratory. More than 100 people are working at GSK Morocco today.

We cannot compare both Markets: dynamics, growth potential, regulations and political environment are completely different. Having said that, there is no impact on our Markets. However, the quality of Human capital will be decisive on where the regional Hub will be located in the Maghreb. .

Global CEO Sir Andrew Witty recently described the acquisition of Novartis' vaccines business as a "major step forward in the group's strategy to create a stronger and more balanced business." What impact will this deal have on Morocco?

The government has achieved a great effort to provide all children with vaccination and GlaxoSmithKline is a key partner in this process, ensuring that we are putting all in place to increase access, makingit affordable for the maximum number of patients.

What are the growth and investment opportunities for GSK in Morocco?

GSK has several partnerships with local companies in Morocco, either for manufacturing or secondary packaging. One of these partnerships is related to vaccines secondary packaging. Vaccines operations require highly technical skills and are an important component in our business. This is a great opportunity for knowledge and technology transfer to Morocco.

While anti-infective products are the base of our business and this will continue, the growth driver will definitely be our respiratory portfolio; GSK has a particularly important and innovative pipeline for the future which will help expand our presence in Morocco.

Hubert de Ruty, country president of Pfizer Morocco, claimed that the high level of education was one of Morocco's major strengths allowing him to export local talent across the region. Would you agree with this assessment?

I believe the main reason why GSK´s North Africa hub is in Morocco and not elsewhere, is the high level of skills and expertise we have in the country. Sir Andrew Witty, CEO, visited Morocco last year in September: he commented that he was e impressed by the quality of the people here in Morocco. This is a great testimony!

Photo Comité de Direction GSK



In my leadership team I have diversified profiles who have come over from Canada, US, Switzerland and France, a high calibre of talented people. We made tremendous progress in feeding our succession Pipeline and filling some local leadership roles internally, we also did well in exporting talents last couple of Years, either to Regional Roles or to other locations, examples, multi-channel director and Finance Director, HRBL roles for the North Africa region, MENA HR Director in MENA CIS countries, IT Head for Algeria, IT Head for Saudi, and still more to come. We could create center of excellence for North African Markets with subject Matter Experts/ Talented and High calibre individuals from Morocco and Tunisia.

One of my key objectives is to upgrade our people capabilities and expose their competencies to the region. At headquarters level, what I am trying to do is to increase my team's exposure in regional events, projects and meetings. During last CEO visit in Morocco, I insisted on organising a business review meeting so he could see the quality of the people we have here. Moreover in best practices, we are trying to develop many local projects and have them presented across the region.

Having worked for a number of multinationals here in Morocco, including Sanofi, Novartis and GSK, how do you see GSK standing out and what are some of the major differences?

All research based companies have globally the same goals and the same ways of working. There are no major differences. In my first day at GSK, I was at GSK House, company headquarter in London, with the senior management and I was asked the same question. At Sanofi, Novartis or GlaxoSmithKline the patient is always at the heart of what we do. Quality and compliance always remains critical. The culture is different but the core and the values remain the same.

When you took on your current role in 2012, what was your vision for GSK in the country?

The priority for GSK and as a member of Maroc Innovation & Santé (MIS), is to have the necessary accompanying measures for, a smooth market authorization process, an effective reimbursement system, to allow availability of innovative drugs for patients.

Improving the reimbursements system is challenging because of the budget constraints, leading government to put in place many cost containments measures. But I do believe in the willingness to move forward, from industry, healthcare professionals and government side. We need to work very closely to find and implement solutions together.

Where do you expect to see GSK and more broadly the pharmaceutical sector in Morocco in five years' time?

I am very confident for the pharmaceutical industry future in Morocco. We did go through a downturn over the last two years, but now we foresee positive signs, with market recovery and patients having more access to treatments.

From GSK perspective this is reflected in the volumes sales we are achieving, meaning we are covering more patients. Pharmaceutical market is expected to start recovering in 2016.

An important patient pool is seeking treatment today, when you consider that only around 40 percent of the population has health insurance: if we manage to increase the coverage rate to 70 or 80 percent, this would mean excellent achievement for Moroccan patient and a real potential for growth for pharmaceutical companies. I am also confident because there is a high level of constructive discussion and communication.

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