# Abdelhakim Tahri – CEO, Gynebio Pharma, Morocco



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*CEO Abdelhakim Tahri introduces women's health player Gynebio Pharma, how the company is disrupting the Moroccan pharmaceutical industry through its range of contraceptive and fertility products, and his vision for regional expansion.*

**GyneBio is one of the youngest pharmaceutical companies in Morocco. Could you introduce it?**

Prior to the creation of Gynebio Pharma, in 2011, I was working as a regional director for North and West Africa for Organon, which later became MSD. Thus, I already had expertise in the pharmaceutical industry in the region which led me to the idea of creating a Moroccan pharma company focused on woman's health on one side and on biosimilars and biotechnology on the other.

The name Gynebio Pharma showcases the two areas of expertise for the company, gynaecology and biosimilars. In association with Cooper Pharma, a leading local pharma player, we decided to launch this project and create an innovative leading pharma company dedicated to hormonal treatments and fertility products.

In order to have the status of pharmaceutical company in Morocco, there must be a production manufacturing site. Thus in 2018, Gynebio Pharma opened a manufacturing plant that is 100 percent focused on the production of hormonal treatments for women (contraceptive pills, fertility

products) as well as corticosteroides and oncology hormonal drugs. It is a high-end production site, a real innovation for Morocco and for the overall region. Our ambition is to ensure this production site is certified with international standards; we are currently starting to prepare the EMA certification, and then aim to have FDA certification.

**What was your vision in setting up the company?**

Our major focus when creating Gynebio Pharma was creating a company and a production facility that would benefit Morocco, but also Africa and the Middle East; in other words, to be able to answer the needs of the entire MENA region.

At Gynebio Pharma, we believe that we need to be less dependent on imported products and be able to satisfy the needs of the country and of Moroccan patients, but also to develop a regional footprint. It is crucial to be able to provide the local market and demand with locally produced medicine, while servicing the continental demand for hormonal drugs.

Indeed, our production capacity is currently around 20 million units and could reach 40 million units, this performance could enable us to provide 100 percent of the Moroccan market of hormonal drugs.

**Gynebio Pharma’s production site is a pioneer in Morocco and you are the only company producing hormonal products. What were the key steps in the successful execution of this industrial project?**

The company was created less than a decade ago, there was a succession of steps on which we worked on before the implementation of our own production facility. Indeed, we started to work on the marketing and the promotion of products that already existed on the market our partner Cooper Pharma.

These decisions have led to Gynebio Pharma’s positioning as the Moroccan market leader for contraception; as a matter of fact, one woman in four in Morocco consumes a Gynebio Pharma product. Indeed, we are able to provide Moroccan women with a product that accessible and affordable while being locally produced; in Morocco, a contraceptive pill costs around 2.5 euros which is less than third of European price; it enables further access to this type of solution.

In addition to hormonal drugs, we are developing and launching several contraceptive generic products while developing innovative solutions. Indeed, we are developing generics through our research and development or through tech transfer that we have acquired. We are also able to be innovative in contraception thanks to partnerships and under-licensing agreement with European and American pharma companies.

**How did you manage to accomplish this feat?**

We have several European partnerships in terms of contraception such as with French companies and German companies; we also have partnerships in Scandinavian countries for gynaecological products and we are in partnership with Sanzyme for fertility products.

As a matter of fact, many solutions for fertility have a monopoly on the Moroccan market, whereas there is a high demand and need for them. We decided to partner with Sanzyme to make these solutions available to Moroccan couples that have a fertility issue.

As I was saying the demand is high, it affects 10 percent to 15 percent of married couples and these treatments are generally expensive while techniques such in vitro fertilization (IVF) are also very expensive.

The Moroccan Gynecology Association has done great work to bring this problem to the authorities and make it a priority. Gynebio Pharma is also highly involved in this and has committed to working towards more accessible and affordable fertility solutions. It must be a pathology that is recognized and to be in a process to integrate the list of reimbursed medicine in Morocco.

**According to the UN, sexual and reproductive health remains weak in Morocco. How would you like to see health authorities strengthen sexual and reproductive health in the country?**

Morocco has greatly improved overall, we are working slowly towards it, but we are improving when it comes to women’s and infants’ health. Indeed, the infant and childbirth mortality rate has drastically decreased. In addition to which, we can observe that Morocco has also made considerable advances when it comes to family planning, with a diminishing demographic growth. The birth rate in Morocco is close to European birth rates, which showcases the advancement of the situation whereas it remains high in the largest part of the African continent.

In terms of fertility, Morocco was lagging behind its Algerian and Tunisian neighbours, but the country is catching up. Universal health coverage is an asset that will enable further development in this field through the reimbursement of treatment and techniques for Moroccan families.

**How did you leverage your long experience at a multinational company with expertise in women's health?**

Thanks to a devoted team with experience and expertise, we have obtained great results. But more than that, it is thanks to a common willingness to create a local company that can have an international footprint to become a reference in women's health. It has enabled us to reach our objective and to be a leader in contraceptive medicine for the Moroccan market. In recent years, we have focused on the marketing and promotion of the products and medicine that we could bring to the market, now we can even go further thanks to the production facility, it enables Gynebio Pharma to reach the Moroccan market as well as regional and international markets.

**Do you think Morocco has the capacity to develop and grow as an international hub for the region?**

Morocco has over 70 years of experience in production and expertise in the pharmaceutical sector; nevertheless, the market remains limited compared to that of Tunisia and Algeria, that have surpassed us. Indeed, Morocco is still missing universal coverage to catch up with its neighbours.

In comparison, Morocco has the expertise but does not have the market size. Nevertheless, the authorities' objectives to reach 90 percent of the population through universal coverage by 2030 demonstrates the willingness and the potential of Morocco. Furthermore, Morocco is attractive for investment thanks to the ongoing south-south cooperation that has been fostered.

**What do you see as the main hurdles to the development of the African pharmaceutical industry?**

Sovereignty with regards to health is a major asset, through the expertise of several countries on the African continent such as Tunisia, Algeria, South Africa, and Morocco, an independent continent could emerge. There are still challenges to overcome, yet, local African authorities are fostering investment and support industrial pharmaceutical companies in order to enable the access of

medicine in Africa.

Nonetheless, there is an overall slowness to bring medicine onto the market, it can take up to three years which is dramatically long. Authorities are working toward easing the process, to get rid of the current brakes that are slowing down African development, it will be possible through the adequate legislation will enable the access of new medicines onto the market and avoiding monopolies while guaranteeing quality and security.

**Where would you like to see GyneBio in the next five years when we come back to Morocco?**

Gynebio Pharma’s objective is to be participating and to be an actor in African family planning, providing means of contraception, innovative and generic medicines to African patients. Africa needs to benefit from both innovation and generics, to do so, local production and generic production are priorities to foster in order to ensure sovereignty and independence and are key for the continent’s development.

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