

# HEALTHCARE & LIFE SCIENCES REVIEW



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# MOROCCO

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# NEW HORIZONS IN RARE DISEASES

Dr Driss Chaoui, CEO of Afric-Phar, one of the leading domestic companies in Moroccan pharma, provides insight into the major recent developments for the company, highlighting its emergent focus on the rare diseases field.

**Dr Chaoui, we first met you 2015 when you introduced us to Afric-Phar. What major developments for the group have occurred over the last five years?**

**DRISS CHAOUI (DC):** We've been working on expanding on several fronts; one of the most significant advancements was the opening of an R&D unit three years ago, focused on developing the formulas of our own generics. We are currently the first and only laboratory in Morocco to locally manufacture a fixed-dose combination (FDC), a triple therapy combination of three active drugs in a single dosage form for the treatment of high blood pressure. We have also developed other medications from our R&D lab that are being registered.

Secondly, we continue to represent multinational pharmaceutical companies and in-license their products. The last partnership we signed was with Gilead for the distribution of Hepatitis B & C drugs, HIV products, and fungal diseases medicine, with, of course, prices adapted to the Moroccan market.

Thirdly, we have continued to grow our activity around rare diseases and orphan drugs, as Afric-Phar's prime duty is to help all patients, including those with rare diseases – we are talking of around ten patients only in Morocco for some cases.

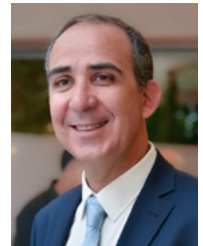
Lastly, we created Pharmis, a subsidiary pharma lab of Afric-Phar. This affiliate rents a production unit to the Indian laboratory Sun Pharmaceuticals and offers them distribution and contract manufacturing services. This

partnership with Sun Pharma dates back to the license we initially had with Ranbaxy. At a point in time, Ranbaxy decided to strengthen its presence in Morocco, and Afric-Phar accompanied them along the way, as they successively got acquired by Daiichi Sankyo and then Sun Pharmaceuticals.

**It is interesting to see that you define Afric-Phar as a generic player; yet you have a partnership with innovative frontrunner Gilead and have a noticeable activity in the field of rare diseases. Isn't there some sort of a contradiction here?**

**DC:** We cannot put innovators and generic players in opposition as they are entirely complementary, with each one having a precise role to play. Gilead is a typical example of a research-driven company that has clearly understood this: they focus on R&D to develop highly innovative drugs, and they have out-licensed some of them to generics firms, as we've seen with the hepatitis drugs that were granted to ten Indian pharma companies.

When a patent falls into the public domain, the owner should not cling to its 'cash cow' products and prevent the generic version from being developed and marketed; the role of pharma innovators is to create ground-breaking solutions that save and improve lives. We understand that the industry maintains the 20 years of patent protection policy to help finance and sustain the pace of innovation. But in some instances – or after that time,



**Driss Chaoui**  
CEO, Afric-Phar

“WORKING IN RARE DISEASES IMPLIES HAVING A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO WHAT WE HAVE IN GENERICS”



generic companies come into play to expand access to these new drugs, which has an extraordinarily positive impact on the health and wellness of millions of people.

Afric-Phar recognizes the importance of our complimentary strategic roles. We firmly believe in the value of these partnerships and the potential of the breakthrough innovations they lead. This is even more important in times of health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic we are currently enduring. Having a partner such as Gilead, whose experimental drug remdesivir may be the first effective coronavirus treatment, could bring the opportunity to offer the latest treatments to Moroccan patients.

We look forward to continuing to nourish and leverage these external collaborations.

**What was the rationale behind entering the rare diseases field?**

**DC:** We are incredibly proud of our current and past partnerships in the rare disease field. We started ten years ago by introducing Genzyme’s products in Morocco, but after its acquisition by Sanofi, we had to transfer the portfolio back. We were also the first company in Morocco to register Actelion’s products, but again, following its acquisition by J&J, we lost the rights to market these products.

Today, we are partnering with Orphan Europe, SOBI and

Nutricia. We are also focusing on other niches such as organ preservation products for kidney transplantations with IGL Group.

Even though our rare disease activity only represents five to seven percent of our revenues, Afric-Phar has really discovered a passion for helping those impacted.

Working in rare diseases implies having a different approach to what we have in generics; we collaborate with many associations and know the patients and their medical teams. We are rendering valuable medical service to them. Moreover, our purpose aligns with patient-centricity; it’s a powerful instrument that drives what we are all about and what we do at Afric-Phar. ❁