Revue francophone sur la santé et les territoires

Les circulations en santé : des produits, des savoirs, des personnes en mouvement | 2019

Local production of medicines in Mozambique: at crossroads of pharmaceutical knowledge circulation

Alila Brossard Antonielli

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rfst/784>

DOI: 10.4000/rfst.784

ISSN: 2492-3672

Publisher

Espaces et SOciétés (UMR 6590)

Electronic reference

Alila Brossard Antonielli, "Local production of medicines in Mozambique: at crossroads of pharmaceutical knowledge circulation", *Revue francophone sur la santé et les territoires* [Online], Healthy circulation: products, knowledge, people on the move, Online since 16 December 2019, connection on 06 April 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rfst/784> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfst.784>

This text was automatically generated on 6 April 2021.

La Revue francophone sur la santé et les territoires est mise à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Partage dans les Mêmes Conditions 4.0 International.

Local production of medicines in Mozambique: at crossroads of pharmaceutical knowledge circulation

Alila Brossard Antonielli

- 1 In the first years after its independence in 1975, Mozambique had a voluntarist pharmaceutical policy that prioritised essential generic medicines, in accordance with the World Health Organization's policies at the time of 'Health for All' and the Alma-Ata Conference. Several initiatives to install local production of medicines in Mozambique were started in the late 1970s–1980s with International support from United Nations Agencies, bilateral cooperation from European and Socialist countries and a Swedish multinational pharmaceutical company. UNIDO experts from Hungary and Bangladesh did install an Oral Rehydration Salts production unit in Beira City, funded by PNUD. The EMOFAR plant (Mozambique Pharmaceutical Enterprise, in its Portuguese acronym) did not manage to produce at full capacity in a context of economic crisis, structural adjustment, civil war and lack of professionals with the requirements to be trained for its management and production process and closed around 1989.
- 2 In 2008, the Mozambican government acquired a bankrupted private pharmaceutical serum plant in order to receive a transfer of technology and skills training from Brazilian Ministry of Health State owned laboratory Farmanguinhos. The new Mozambican factory, named Mozambican Society of Medicines (SMM in its Portuguese acronym), was first conceived to produce antiretrovirals for HIV/AIDS treatment, but Mozambican health authorities negotiated with their Brazilian counterparts to include other essential medicines in its portfolio. By including common antidiabetic, hypertension and analgesic drugs, Mozambican health officials linked this South-South Cooperation project with their 1970s pharmaceutical policies centred on the Essential Medicines List. The Brazilian government funded the equipment, the training and the raw materials. The training of Mozambican technicians and managers by a team of

Brazilian pharmacists, chemists and engineers with extensive work experience in private-owned pharmaceutical plants in Brazil, took place in Mozambique and in Brazil. The transfer of knowledge and skills and building capabilities is ongoing since 2008, with phases of theoretical and practical (on-the-job) training. The participants stressed that the technological learning process also encompassed the acquisition of managerial skills and of international certification norms such as Good Manufacturing Practices. This process revealed the challenges of transferring knowledge between two asymmetrical personnel, in terms of initial training and work experience. The retention of trained Mozambican professionals in a context with limited qualified professionals is also problematic.

- 3 Moreover, some Mozambican authorities and their Brazilian partners still debate the aims of this enterprise: to produce generic drugs exclusively for the Ministry of Health supply or to export production to generate revenue for the Mozambican State. The economic resiliency of SMM is put under strain by the competition of medicine imports from international donors, such as PEPFAR, and the low prices from Indian Generic Manufacturers. More recently, an Indian Generic Pharmaceutical Firm installed a new plant only minutes away from SMM, also training Mozambican staff in India, and is already selling some of its production to the Mozambican Ministry of Health. It was found, however, that this firm did not promote local acquisition of managerial and more complex technical skills for their Mozambican staff, limiting the possibility of autonomy should the foreign staff leave. In a context where the State is responsible for the majority of medicines procurement, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce have yet to formulate a policy for the two pharmaceutical plants installed in the country or to include them in their strategic plans.
- 4 The case of the EMOFAR factory in the 1980s and the more recent SMM project and Indian private subsidiary show that Mozambique's political willingness to foster local production of medicines is highly dependent on capital, technological and managerial transfers and circulation from foreign actors. Although the Mozambican health authorities did sometimes adapt the knowledge and objectives of these enterprises into their priorities, so far, they have failed to support the plants in the long term with specific health, fiscal or industrial policies. This situation thus questions whether the status of medicines in Mozambique, which were regarded as strategic public goods that required local production for economic, political and access to health reasons, is changing.
- 5 This article draws on work for a PhD thesis that describes the dynamics of knowledge and skills transfer in industrial pharmacy between Mozambican and international professionals, focusing especially on the SMM project. The methodology included interviews, on site observations at the SMM plant and the gathering of official documents and archives on past local production experiences in Mozambique.

Image: Mozambique's SMM employees packing medicines in 2018. Photo by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC).

INDEX

Keywords: local production, generic medicines, knowledge circulation

AUTHOR

ALILA BROSSARD ANTONIELLI

École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales – EHESS Centre de recherche médecine, sciences, santé, santé mentale, société – CERMES3