



Interview with the Head of the Secretariat for the World Local production Forum Dr Jicui Dong, November 2023

In this interview, the Head of the Secretariat for the World Local production Forum Dr Jicui Dong reflects on the outcomes and transformative impacts of the forum.

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Interviewer: Why has WHO established the World Local Production Forum (WLPF)?

Dr Jicui Dong: The COVID-19 pandemic taught the world sobering truths about the global health architecture. Global production capacity of health products was insufficient to meet global demand. Production was over-concentrated in just a few countries or regions. Global supply chains were susceptible to disruptions. Timely, equitable access to life-saving health products was constrained, particularly to those most vulnerable.

The pandemic spurred low- and middle-income countries to embark on building local production and technology transfer capacity. In just a few years, the number of new actors entering the local production and technology transfer space soared, and existing actors greatly ramped up their efforts to support these countries. Without synergy and coordination, the myriad of actors and efforts to strengthen local production and technology transfer poses a great risk of overlap or duplication.

As requested by resolution World Health Assembly resolution WHA74.6 on *Strengthening local production of medicines and other health technologies to improve access*, WHO launched the World Local Production Forum (WLPF) in the wake of COVID-19 to foster global coordination and synergies among all actors in strengthening local production and technology transfer.

Interviewer: What do we want to achieve with this 2nd WLPF?

Dr Jicui Dong: That is a very good question. What we would like to achieve with this 2nd WLPF is to help countries navigate through the complexities and challenges to achieve sustainable quality local production and technology transfer and improve timely, equitable access. Let me describe how the 2nd WLPF can do this:

1. To provide a unique global platform to foster partnerships among the public and private sectors, UN agencies, academia, development financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders
2. To foster alignment and global coordination among existing national, regional and global initiatives and efforts by all actors in local production and technology transfer

3. To co-create innovative solutions to overcome the challenges and bottlenecks in sustainable local production and technology transfer
4. To stimulate greater engagement of the private sector and nurture new partnerships, such as public-private-academic partnerships
5. To produce recommendations to guide synchronized efforts globally toward the 3rd WLPF

Interviewer: Were there recommendations from the 2nd WLPF?

Dr Jicui Dong: Yes, there are 4 recommendations of the 2nd WLPF.

1. **Addressing Information Gaps:** Developing a comprehensive global and regional mapping of manufacturing actors, programs, and resources plus technology transfer.
2. **Supporting Ecosystem Creation:** Providing support and advice to Member States in creating and/or strengthening national, regional, and global ecosystems for sustainable, eco-friendly, quality local production.
3. **Promoting Conducive Public Policies:** Elevating the public health agenda and developing supportive public policies for a conducive financial environment.
4. **Establishing Training Networks:** Promoting the establishment of a network to synchronize training resources and facilities, building capacities in manufacturing, technology transfer, research and development, policy, and regulation.

Interviewer: What are the next steps to ensure those outcomes are operationalized?

Dr Jicui Dong: With new ideas, innovative solutions to overcome challenges and new linkages for collaboration from the 2nd WLPF, countries, WHO and partners can continue our efforts in strengthening local production and technology transfer but in a more holistic, strategic, and synchronized manner for greater impact.

As the WLPF Secretariat, we are working with key partners and stakeholders in implementing the 2nd WLPF recommendations. For instance, UNITAID, WHO and the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD) are collaborating on establishing the Health Product Manufacturing Support Platform (HMSP) to build capacity of African manufacturers to produce active pharmaceutical ingredients and diagnostics and ensure the supply of quality pharmaceuticals and related devices. WHO and the International Finance Corporation are exploring ways to conduct a mapping exercise to mitigate information gaps.

Interviewer: Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, outlined five areas of focus for governments to foster an ecosystem for local production. What is the importance of these five areas to local production?

Dr Jicui Dong: The ecosystem in a country is key to achieve sustainability and quality of local production. There are elements to be considered in building a conducive ecosystem. Indeed, Dr. Tedros mentioned five of them that governments can focus on.

1. Providing an enabling environment.

Policies and regulations shape the environment for manufacturers to produce and supply quality, safe and effective health products. To benefit public health, policy coherence among different sectors, such as health, industry, and trade, are key and health should be in front and in the driver's seat.

2. Providing investment and funding.

Many manufacturers, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, struggle to obtain affordable and sustainable financing for R&D, production, GMP compliance, workforce development, and other activities. Exploring new financing mechanisms is also one recommendation of the 2nd WLPF.

3. Facilitate the exchange of knowledge and technology between the public and private sectors.

The transfer of technology, which could include data, processes, products and technologies, introduces innovation and human capital development into the industry and workforce. It also enables health products that cater to local and/or regional-specific health needs. Technology transfer is an effective way to strengthen capacity for local production. Public-private-academic partnerships play an important role in stimulating R&D and technology diffusion.

4. Build the capacity of the workforce.

Many low- and middle-income countries face on-going challenges in finding a local workforce with appropriate skills and expertise for local production of quality, safe and effective health products. But it is not limited to the industry but also in the private and public sectors along the entire pharmaceutical value chain for the R&D, manufacturing, testing, marketing authorization and distribution of health products. This challenge is even more acute for health products that are more specialized and complex, such as vaccines and biological products.

5. Ensure market access for local manufacturers.

Manufacturers need markets to generate revenue to sustain and further grow their business. Policies, incentives and mechanisms to ensure access to markets for local manufacturers are key. Regionalization of production is a strategy to de-fragment markets and help to achieve economies of scale. Reliable national and regional market data are critical to enable predictable demand forecasting to ensure the demand aligns with the supply.

Interviewer: The regional dimension was recognized as an important strategy for sustainable local production during the 2nd WLPF. What is the importance for regionalization?

Dr Jicui Dong: Regional production can make production more viable and strategic. For example, economies of scale in production are within reach, markets can be de-fragmented and supply chains can be diversified. Resources can be shared and there is a larger pool of expertise within the region. It can increase opportunities for technology transfer and capacity building as well as financing from partners and donors.

However, a regional approach is not without its challenges. Coordination, governance, ownership and decision-making need to be considered. Regulatory convergence or harmonization is needed for exportation. There are intellectual property rights to consider, such as legal barriers with the transfer of know-how. And supply chain management within the region will be complex.

Interviewer: With interest in technology transfer rising sharply since COVID-19, why do you think this is so?

Dr Jicui Dong: Technology transfer plays an important role in strengthening and diversifying local production capacity in a more effective manner. It builds technical knowledge and skills of the workforce that are needed for R&D and production of health products. Manufacturers receiving transferred

technology can leverage on the technology holder's production date and experience, supply chains for the raw materials & equipment, marketing etc.

Technology transfers occur within the private sector and between the public and private sectors. But transferring technology is complex and low- and middle-income countries face challenges with it. For instance, the technology receiver has limited capacity to negotiate win-win licensing agreements or does not have quality systems or a trained workforce to manage and absorb the data, processes and technology being transferred.