GS1 Healthcare

GS1 Healthcare Africa update

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Reflecting on progress since the 2019 Lagos Call to Action (CTA)

Over the past decade, Africa's journey toward pharmaceutical traceability has steadily advanced—from aspiration to implementation.

In 2019, more than 25 countries signed the Lagos Call to Action (CTA), committing to strengthening the tracking, verification, and management of medicines across public health systems using global GS1 standards. Six years later, the results of that commitment are visible. Countries are now translating policy and dialogue into real progress on the ground.

In this issue

The paths to progress have varied. Some have prioritised regulatory frameworks and supporting infrastructure, while others launched pilot projects to test systems, build readiness and learn from the experiences of regional peers.

Today, several regulatory authorities are implementing national strategies, pilots are validating the use of GS1 standards in live settings, helping national teams refine how systems are designed and how data is captured.

At the same time, regional events, such as the Francophone Africa GS1 Healthcare Summits, are playing an invaluable role in surfacing lessons from pilots and early deployments, while reinforcing shared momentum among countries and partners.

Much of this activity is now converging on implementation, as stakeholders translate years of planning and dialogue into tangible progress on the ground. This newsletter highlights some of the common themes emerging from this transformative work over the past 6 years.

Full country-level updates are available in the accompanying infographic and country perspective document.

A phased approach to implementation

Countries are taking a phased approach to implementation, starting with pilots that test how traceability works in specific settings tailored to local needs.

- **Nigeria** has run multiple pilot projects across several geopolitical zones and product categories, assessing how scanning fits into everyday workflows and how data flows into its national repository
- **Zambia** has combined its traceability legislation publication with pilot activities supported by USAID and other partners, including warehouse scanning and GS1 Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) collection through its National Product Catalogue effort
- **Ethiopia** has embedded GS1 GTIN and Global Location Number (GLN) identifiers in national guidance, with health workers using a mobile application to verify the authenticity of medicines before dispensing them to patients

These phased approaches allow countries to test operational issues in practice, refine system design and understand the resources or support required for broader rollouts.

Raising awareness and building ownership

National traceability strategies are only effective when they are understood and supported by all stakeholders, particularly local ones. Raising awareness and clarifying roles and responsibilities have been pillars of the early-stage work.

- **Botswana** mapped exercises led by the regulatory authority and Ministry of Health to help define who is responsible for what, how responsibilities are shared and where new support mechanisms may be required. A pilot of UNICEF's Traceability and Verification System (TRVST) in Botswana in 2024 helped capture how traceability data moved through public-sector systems and identify points where scanning, verification, and record-keeping should occur, while also clarifying which stakeholders needed to be involved. This type of system-wide testing has helped identify real-world conditions and enhance alignment between regulatory objectives and operational requirements.
- **Uganda** established a national technical working group, formed a governance structure that cut across multiple local governmental entities and their respective partners and conducted readiness assessment workshop to raise awareness.

Alignment with global standards is critical

GS1 standards remain the foundation of Africa's pharmaceutical traceability infrastructure. By providing a consistent framework for capturing and sharing product data, they ensure interoperability at both regional and global levels.

Rwanda began its journey of traceability, aligning with global trends before the 2019 Lagos Call to Action. The country has consistently laid the foundation for a holistic implementation of traceability, considering the broader digital health landscape of the country, utilising not only global GS1 standards but also other global standards.

Across Africa, countries are adopting GS1 DataMatrix barcodes with GTIN, batch/lot numbers, expiry dates, and—progressively—serial numbers, ensuring alignment with international best practices.

This approach connects Africa's progress with global supply chain visibility efforts, enabling seamless integration into wider healthcare systems.

The value of partner collaboration

Development partners have played a critical role in helping countries design, test, and strengthen their traceability systems. They have also raised awareness by developing key guidance documents and translating pilot learnings into blueprints for broader rollouts.

- **WHO** published a policy paper on traceability in 2021, a document summarising country experiences on implementing traceability for medical products and a digital transformation handbook that support countries in developing a holistic view of traceability in the context of health digital supply chain automation. The WHO continues to develop key tools and resources to support countries on this journey.
- **A consortium of development partners** developed technical implementation guidelines for global health commodities to streamline how the development partner community approaches traceability in line with developments in Africa
- **UNICEF** supported countries in rolling out TRVST, providing a platform for authenticating health products and capturing supply chain data in real time
- **USAID** advanced strategic and operational support through the Traceability Implementation Operational Plan (TIOP), piloted in Nigeria in 2024, and also whose code base remains available for countries interested in leveraging the platform

This technical and operational support has underpinned some of the most visible progress across Africa, helping countries move from isolated pilots toward more integrated, standards-based traceability infrastructure. Aside from technical alignment and planning, partner contributions have also helped connect countries through shared tools, peer exchanges and regional coordination, supporting wider progress across the continent.

Looking ahead

Momentum has remained strong through broader changes across health systems since 2019. While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted early timelines, it also highlighted the importance of visibility and data accuracy in public health supply chains.

In 2025, more countries are refining their implementation strategies, passing legislation, and preparing to scale national systems and embed traceability into core healthcare infrastructure.

- **Zimbabwe** passed legislation earlier this year to support national rollout
- **Ghana** is preparing for national pilot phases planned for 2025
- **Nigeria** has entered the second phase of its national traceability implementation, building on lessons from earlier deployments

While each country's journey is different since the 2019 Lagos Call to Action, a clear and shared consensus is emerging: pharmaceutical traceability is essential to protecting patients and strengthening public safety and confidence.

Looking ahead, the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), the African Medicines Agency (AMA), and related regional organisations play a vital role in advancing the next phase of traceability implementation using global standards throughout Africa. Their participation will help ensure that traceability is effectively integrated into comprehensive regional solutions and facilitate the establishment of regional centres of knowledge and expertise on this subject.

The next decade must focus on translating strategies into sustainable national systems. At GS1, we remain committed to partnering with countries, regions, and global organisations to make this vision a reality.

About GS1 Healthcare

GS1 Healthcare is a neutral and open community bringing together all related healthcare stakeholders to lead the successful development and implementation of global GS1 standards, enhancing patient safety, and operational and supply chain efficiencies.

The development and implementation of GS1 standards is led by the experts who use them: pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, group purchasing organisations, hospitals, pharmacies, logistics providers, solution providers, governmental and regulatory bodies, and trade associations. Evidence available from industry implementations shows that GS1 identification, data capture and data sharing standards in healthcare deliver tangible benefit to all stakeholders. Global members of GS1 Healthcare include more than 100 leading healthcare organisations worldwide.

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