FIP-UNESCO UNITWIN strategic roadmap: Focus on the African region

Report from a FIP insight board

2026



International Pharmaceutical Federation

Colophon

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Design and layout:
Adapted from Vladimir Omelchenko | iStockphoto.com

Recommended citation
International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP). FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN strategic roadmap: Focus on the African region. Report from a FIP insight board. The Hague: FIP, 2026

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2 About this report

This report synthesises key insights gathered from discussions during an insight board meeting with colleagues from the African region to inform the reactivation of the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Centre for Excellence (CfE) in Africa. Drawing on an in-depth thematic analysis of stakeholder input, the report outlines region-specific challenges and gaps, emerging priorities, and collaborative opportunities aligned with the FIP Development Goals. The report is structured around five questions posed to participants and concludes with strategic recommendations.

The objectives of this insight board meeting were to:

1. Assess the proposed strategic direction of the African Centre for Excellence against regional priorities and needs.
2. Identify the areas where the Centre can have the greatest impact in advancing pharmaceutical education and sciences, and regional collaboration.
3. Gather regional recommendations to refine and prioritise the Centre's roadmap and implementation activities.
4. Identify opportunities for partnerships, sustainability and regional leadership that will strengthen implementation and long-term impact.

The main questions discussed during the meeting were:

1. How can a reactivated FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Centre for Excellence best deliver value to the African region?
2. What are the most pressing and emerging priorities in pharmacy education, research, and pharmaceutical sciences across Africa that a CfE should help address?
3. How can an African CfE best collaborate with the African Association of Schools of Pharmacy (ASPA), academic institutional members (AIMs), and regional stakeholders to maximise collective impact?
4. What approaches, partnerships, or structures would best support long-term sustainability, regional engagement, and meaningful collaboration through an African CfE?
5. Looking ahead to 2030, what would success and meaningful regional impact look like for the African CfE?

This report summarises the insight board discussions and the key perspectives shared by participants. The views expressed reflect the expertise and experiences of the contributors and do not necessarily represent FIP's formal policy positions. The insights gathered will inform future FIP guidance and associated activities to support the operationalisation of a FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN CfE in the African Region.

3 Background

3.1 Introduction

The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) is the global body for pharmacy practice, pharmacy education and pharmaceutical sciences. Through 160 member organisations, 228 academic institutional members, six observer organisations and more than 4,600 individual members, we represent more than 5.5 million pharmacists, pharmacy educators and pharmaceutical scientists around the world. Through all its membership categories, FIP has a global presence in 157 countries and territories, representing 80.5% of the world.

Our vision: A world where everyone benefits from access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines and health technologies, as well as from pharmaceutical care services provided by pharmacists, in collaboration with other healthcare professionals.

Our mission: To support global health by advancing pharmaceutical practice, sciences, and education, advocating for pharmacists' roles in healthcare systems worldwide, promoting equitable access to medicines and care, and fostering sustainability in pharmacy to address critical challenges such as climate change and global health disparities.

UNESCO

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is a specialised agency focused on promoting education, science, culture, and communication to enhance global unity. It sets standards, develops tools, and generates knowledge to address major global challenges while fostering equality and peace. Its work includes protecting biodiversity, responding to artificial intelligence, advancing quality education, safeguarding heritage, and ensuring access to reliable information in collaboration with its 194 member states worldwide.

UNESCO has four key strategic objectives:

a. **To ensure equitable and inclusive education for all**: For UNESCO, education is a fundamental human right and UNESCO commits to supporting lifelong learning by promoting early childhood education, literacy for all and technical and vocational training.
b. **To build sustainable societies by sharing scientific progress**: UNESCO has established programmes that mobilise international experts to help preserve biodiversity and build more sustainable societies.
c. **To make the world more just and inclusive**: As the United Nations agency for intercultural understanding and cultural diversity, UNESCO works to build inclusive, just and peaceful knowledge societies, while protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.
d. **To guarantee that new technologies benefit humanity**: UNESCO is committed to ensuring that emerging technologies are accessible to all, and users are equipped with the skills to navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape.

UNESCO UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme

The UNESCO UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme was established in 1992 to foster international inter-university cooperation and networking to enhance institutional capacities through knowledge sharing and collaborative work.[1] The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme, referred to by UNESCO as the "UNITWIN Network," is a unique intellectual and strategic resource comprising hundreds of institutions across more than 120 countries. UNITWIN stands for University Twinning and Networking and aims to strengthen connections between research and development, policy,

and practice at national, regional, and global levels. It has contributed to strengthening higher education systems and fostering collaborative research partnerships and networks.

FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Network

In 2010, FIP and UNESCO, in collaboration with the FIP University College London School of Pharmacy Collaborating Centre, established an innovative global network under the UNITWIN framework: the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Cooperation network in Global Pharmacy Education Development (GPhEd). This pioneering initiative was the first UNITWIN network in higher education for any health profession, and the first dedicated to global pharmaceutical education. The African Centre for Excellence was the first to be launched under this network. The FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Network on Global Pharmacy Education Development aims to promote an integrated system of research, teaching, and training, as well as community engagement and communication. It facilitates collaboration between high-level, internationally recognised researchers and teaching staff of the coordinating institution (FIP), member institutions, and other institutions across different regions of the world. The network's priority workstreams for transforming pharmaceutical education and science are shown in figure 1.

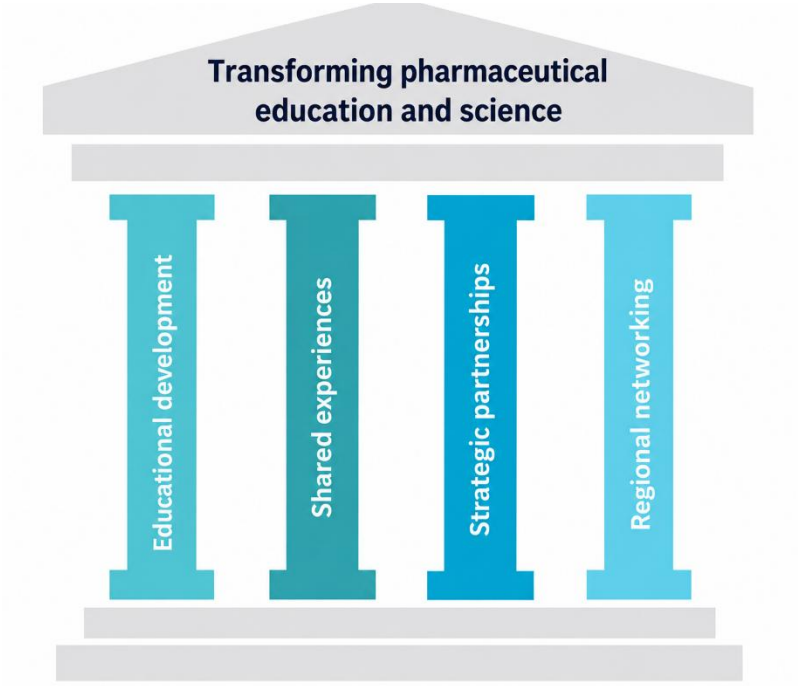


Figure 1: Priority workstreams for transforming pharmaceutical education and science

Over the past decade and a half, the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN network has grown across Centres for Excellence across all WHO regions, including the Western Pacific, South-East Asia, Eastern Mediterranean, the Americas and Europe. In accordance with the renewed agreement with UNESCO (2023–2027), the objectives of the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Network are to:

- Enhance the integrated system of research, training, information and documentation activities in the field of global pharmacy education, addressing issues of academic capacity, quality assurance of educational systems and workforce competency.
- Lead educational and scientific transformations, and promote global collaboration to address sustainability, inequities and technology in education through the establishment of new regional centres for excellence across all regions of the world.
- Contribute to the improvement of global health.
- Cooperate closely with UNESCO, other UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks on relevant programmes and activities.

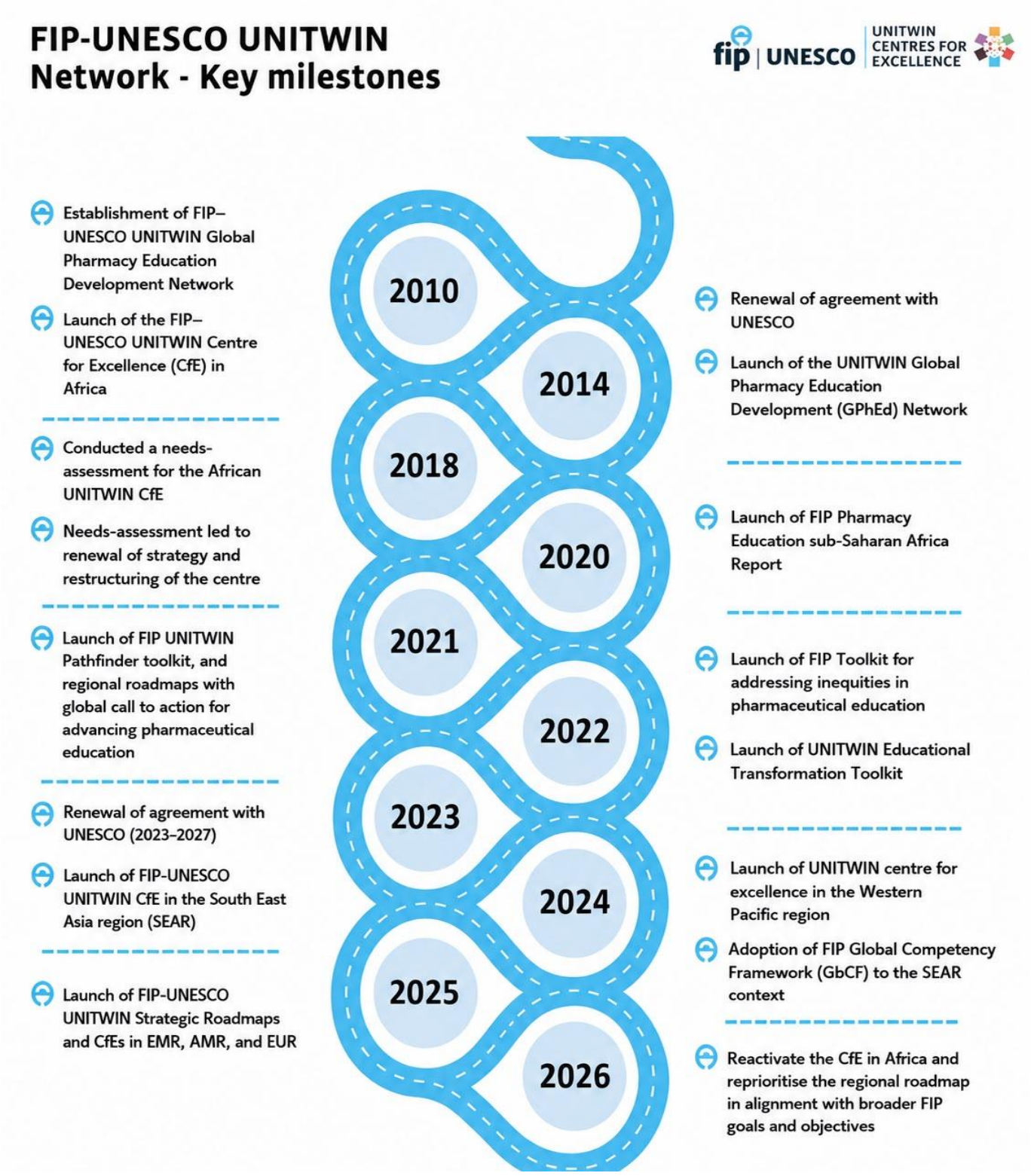


Figure 2: Key milestones for the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN network

3.2 FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Centre for Excellence in the African region

Across Africa, the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN CfE has played a key role in strengthening collaboration among schools of pharmacy, advancing pharmacy and pharmaceutical education and research, and supporting workforce development across sub-Saharan Africa. Since its establishment in 2010, the centre has led several landmark initiatives through its continent-wide network, including:

- FIP pharmacy education in Sub-Saharan Africa report (2020): It provides an overview of the needs and priorities of pharmacy education in sub-Saharan African countries, with a particular focus on academic capacity and needs-based education. The report highlights pressing challenges and presents a decade's worth of evidence on how pharmacy education and the pharmaceutical workforce have responded to changing health and societal needs.[2]
- FIP UNITWIN Pathfinder toolkit (2021): A compilation of tools, resources and information that offers stepwise guidance to academic institutions globally on setting up FIP-UNESCO UNITWIN Centres for Excellence in their region, and supports African institutions and partners in establishing intra-regional associations of schools of pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences by sharing experiences from other regions.[3]
- FIP Education Transformation toolkit (2022): A digital, globally relevant resource collection that provides an evidence-based framework and roadmap for FIP members to advance pharmaceutical education and support collaboration between FIP members and key stakeholders in co-creating regional strategies and solutions.[4]
- FIP toolkit for addressing inequities in pharmaceutical education (2023): A digital toolkit focused on identifying and addressing inequities in pharmaceutical education, supporting institutions and educators to design inclusive, needs-based programmes across different contexts.[5]

A significant milestone of the African CfE has been the establishment of the Association of Schools of Pharmacy in Africa (ASPA), grandfathered by the African Regional Pharmaceutical Forum and now formally registered in Nigeria and Cameroon in 2025. As an independent legal entity, ASPA brings together schools of pharmacy across Africa and champions the region's evolving needs in pharmacy and pharmaceutical education, complementing the UNITWIN CfE's role in driving regional collaboration and impact.

Following the establishment of ASPA as an independent regional association, and to ensure continued alignment with the global FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN network, FIP is reactivating the African CfE as a strategic regional platform to support collaboration, innovation, and advancement in pharmacy and pharmaceutical education, and scientific engagement under the auspices of the 2023-2027 FIP–UNESCO agreement. The reactivated CfE will provide a platform to connect academic institutions across the region around a shared vision for advancing pharmaceutical education and science, aligned with FIP's overarching strategic objectives and Development Goals.

4 Key challenges and gaps in pharmaceutical education and science across the African region

Insight board participants identified a set of interrelated challenges and gaps affecting the quality, equity, and advancement of pharmaceutical education and science across the African region.

4.1 Representation, diversity, and inclusion challenges

Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that the reactivated Centre for Excellence (CfE) reflects Africa's linguistic, geographic and institutional diversity from the outset. The first Centre was perceived as having operated primarily within Anglophone (English-speaking) institutions, with limited involvement of Francophone (French-speaking) and Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) institutions. Participants therefore stressed that broad regional representation should be embedded in the Centre's governance and decision-making processes to strengthen its reach, relevance and inclusivity.

Participants also highlighted the importance of appropriate translation and interpretation to enable meaningful participation in priority-setting and decision-making across linguistic groups.

> *"We would need to constitute a group that represents the diverse nature of Africa itself... there was no inclusion of the other regions, the Francophones, the Lusophones." — Nigeria*

> *"We have French speakers that don't speak English, we have Portuguese speakers that don't speak English, and so we have to find a way... [to have] translations." — Nigeria*

Participants also noted differing levels of engagement with the Association of Schools of Pharmacy in Africa (ASPA). While ASPA was described as visible and active in several West African countries, some participants from East Africa reported more limited engagement with its activities. Strengthening engagement across all subregions was therefore considered important to supporting a balanced, continent-wide perspective and ensuring that future collaboration between ASPA and the CfE reflects the diversity of pharmacy education and science across Africa.

> *"It's quite strong in the western part of the continent... but it's not very strongly felt in the East African region, and I'd want to see this being advanced." — Kenya*

4.2 Institutional capacity and resource constraints

4.2.1 Financial barriers to AIM membership

Participants identified financial constraints as an important barrier to participating in FIP's AIM network for some African schools of pharmacy; they described limited institutional funding and, in some settings, reliance on tuition fees or short-term external partnerships, which can make the costs associated with institutional membership difficult to sustain. Participants considered that this contributes to the low representation of African schools within the AIM network and may, in turn, limit opportunities for participation in and leadership of the reactivated Centre.

Participants therefore suggested exploring more accessible approaches to membership that take account of the differing financial realities of the schools of pharmacy across the region.

"By the time they looked at the charges and the fees, it was returned to the Faculty of Pharmacy that... if we can raise the funds, then we could go ahead but we could not raise the funds." – Nigeria

"We had to seek industry partnership, but that was only sustained for two years... like most other African schools of pharmacy, they're underfunded. We need to find a way to make AIM membership accessible." — Zimbabwe

4.2.2 Diversity in system maturity across Africa

Participants highlighted considerable diversity in the maturity, regulatory environments and institutional capacity of pharmacy education systems across Africa. They emphasised that the reactivated CfE will need to recognise these differences when developing regional activities and approaches, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach.

They suggested identifying common denominators in curriculum, accreditation, and workforce needs while explicitly recognising that some systems require more foundational support before they can engage in any regional initiatives. Realising this potential will require consensus-building and strategic planning to design flexible collaboration models that are both ambitious and attainable across diverse national contexts. To respond to this diversity, the Centre could develop a system maturity scale that enables countries and institutions to identify their stage of development across areas such as academic capacity, curriculum, quality assurance and regulation. This would allow support to be tailored to each context and progress to be tracked over time.

"In Africa we have got very diverse systems and structures, and we have some countries where pharmacy has been taught for 60 years or longer, and some countries where pharmacy schools are relatively new. And I think we need to find out where each of the schools, or where each of the countries is, and see what the common denominator is, and maybe work from that." – South Africa

4.2.3 Technical readiness for institutional collaboration

Participants highlighted differences in the technical infrastructure, digital capabilities and institutional readiness to support regional collaboration. They noted that institutions with more limited infrastructure or capacity may face challenges in participating fully in virtual exchange, data sharing, collaborative research and shared educational initiatives.

Addressing this gap will require mapping technical readiness as part of the baseline assessment and pairing less-resourced schools with targeted capacity-building support, so that collaboration models are matched to what institutions can realistically sustain.

"There must be that technical knowledge and transfer to be able to utilise the benefits." – Nigeria

4.2.4 Loss of institutional memory from the first African Centre

Participants shared the importance of retaining and transferring learning from the first African CfE. Some participants had become involved only towards the end of the previous Centre's cycle and therefore had limited knowledge of its earlier activities, achievements and lessons learned.

Participants considered that without providing a concise and structured overview of the previous Centre's work, including relevant outputs, newer participants may inadvertently revisit settled ground or overlook valuable lessons. Providing this common starting point will help members build on existing work rather than starting from scratch.

"What had transpired before my time... it would be interesting for us to then catch up, and then move forward... how best can we collaborate going forward, and what is expected of us as a forum?" – Zimbabwe

5 Emerging needs, opportunities, and priorities for the reactivated Centre for Excellence across the African region

Building on the challenges and gaps identified in the previous section, participants identified a set of emerging needs, opportunities and priorities that could inform the future direction and activities of the reactivated Centre.

5.1 Inclusive governance and leadership

5.1.1 Early engagement of national regulators

An emerging need identified by participants is the early engagement of national pharmacy regulators in discussions on pharmacy education development and reform. They noted that regulators are often engaged only at a later stage; hence policy and curriculum discussions may progress without sufficient consideration of regulatory requirements relating to education, accreditation, licensure, and scope of practice.

Participants therefore emphasised that the reactivated Centre could provide opportunities for structured engagement with regulators, helping to strengthen alignment between developments in pharmacy education and relevant regulatory frameworks. This aligns with FIP Development Goal 13 on policy development in addition to collaborative working with ASPA. The FIP Regulators Advisory Group (RAG) can play a meaningful role in facilitating this engagement.

> *"It will not be easy for us to deliver excellent services to the African region without involving or engaging the pharmacy [education] regulators... so that we can hear from them, get their insights, and then plan with them. It may not be complete harmony in curriculum, but at least there should be some harmony and some agreements concerning the pharmacy education regulation across Africa." — Nigeria*

5.1.2 Leadership and advocacy development

Participants also identified a clear need for dedicated support in leadership and advocacy for deans and heads of schools of pharmacy. There is currently an assumption that academic leaders automatically possess the skills needed to advance pharmacy education within their national contexts, but many lack structured support in making the case for pharmacy to ministries, university management, and regulators. Leadership and advocacy are therefore emerging as taught capabilities, not inherent attributes of the role.

This aligns directly with FIP Development Goal 6 on leadership development, and participants proposed that leadership and advocacy training be established as a concrete, resourced strand within the Centre's activities, rather than remaining a general aspiration.

> *"For the deans, one important issue... is about leadership development... You don't take it for granted. As leaders, they have to be taught." – Ghana*

5.2 Future-ready skills and collaboration

Sections 5.2.1, 5.2.3 and 5.2.4 describe needs that participants identified within their own institutions and systems. These are distinct from the priorities for FIP to support through the Centre (see Table 1) and should be validated through the regional self-assessment proposed in Recommendation 1.

5.2.1 Artificial intelligence in teaching and research

Participants identified artificial intelligence as an emerging priority for pharmacy education and research. While some schools are rapidly adopting AI tools and platforms, others are moving more cautiously, and there is limited shared guidance on ethical use, data protection, or academic integrity. This uneven progress risks widening gaps in educational quality and raising unresolved ethical and privacy concerns.

Participants suggested that the reactivated Centre could support with a continent-wide framework on the responsible use of AI in pharmacy teaching, learning and research. This aligns with the FIP Development Goal 20 on digital health.

"Different schools are adopting and adapting in different manners... if we can get a structure in place that we can sell to the whole continent." – Nigeria

5.2.2 Collaboration between associations and universities

Participants highlighted the need to strengthen collaboration between universities, which hold most of the region's research and academic capacity, and professional associations, which lead on continuing professional development and practice-focused initiatives. At present, many activities operate in silos, with limited translation of university-based research into practice and limited use of association platforms to inform and refine academic programmes. This fragmentation slows progress and dilutes the impact of both sectors on patient care.

"If you are working in silos, we might find that development doesn't happen for the benefit of the patient... there's more research going on in universities than the associations on their own." – Zimbabwe

Participants also emphasised the importance of collaboration beyond pharmacy, recognising that pharmacists practise as part of multidisciplinary healthcare teams.

"As we move forward in pharmacy education, we should remain cognisant that when we are practising, we will be practising together with other colleagues for the benefit of the patient." – Zimbabwe

5.2.3 Antimicrobial stewardship competencies

Participants identified antimicrobial stewardship as an important area for strengthening pharmacy education across the region. They highlighted the need to prepare graduates to apply antimicrobial stewardship principles across diverse practice settings, including hospitals, community pharmacies and other environments where access and use of antimicrobials may differ considerably.

They noted that FIP Development Goal 17 on antimicrobial stewardship offers a ready-made framework and resource base that can be integrated into existing work on quality assurance and capacity-building, rather than treated as a standalone project.

"We have private hospitals, we have community pharmacies, we have various other sources... then we have the unregulated sources, the open markets... how do we teach antimicrobial stewardship in a system where so many things are already broken?" – Nigeria

5.2.4 Quality assurance and recognition of pharmacy education

Participants also identified an emerging need to support graduate mobility and recognition of African pharmacy qualifications internationally. Pharmacists seeking to practise or specialise in regions such as Europe, the Americas, or Australia often encounter uncertainty from regulators about the quality and comparability of their training. This lack of clear benchmarks can limit opportunities for individuals and hide the strengths of African institutions.

Participants discussed the potential value of mechanisms that could support institutions in assessing their education and training against agreed quality standards or benchmarks.

"A standardisation tool which we can apply to the various training institutions or other practice centres... to establish or evaluate: do they meet the minimum requirements?" – Kenya

FIP already offers a range of resources that the Centre can draw on to support this, including the FIP Nanjing Statements on pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences education[6]; the FIP global framework for quality assurance of pharmacy education[7]; the FIP Development Goals[8]; and curriculum support resources such as the FIP Global Competency Framework[9].

5.3 Sustainability of the Centre

Participants identified a clear need for delivery and funding models that are both financially sustainable and accessible to all institutions, regardless of resources. They emphasised that proposals and activities should be locally driven and grounded in the realities of African schools, with those working on the ground best placed to identify weaknesses, strengths, and what is realistically achievable. In practical terms, they expressed a strong preference for low-cost formats, such as webinars and virtual convenings, over expensive, in-person meetings, arguing that participation should not be determined by travel budgets. This commitment to "moving together and leaving no institution behind" requires formats that even the least well-resourced schools can join consistently.

"Whatever proposals are being suggested come from us, who are on the ground… they need not be expensive, they need not be physical." – Kenya

At the same time, participants highlighted the need for funding approaches that build long-term resilience rather than dependency. They agreed that any strategies adopted to advance FIP goals should be designed to remain viable after external support has tapered, with financial assistance structured to decrease as institutional maturity and local ownership grow. To support this, they proposed engaging regulators and partners from the outset with a clear plan for how meetings and activities will be funded and how continuity will be maintained, so that the work can continue independently of any single champion. Framing sustainability as a gradual journey, they advocated breaking ambitious goals into achievable, resourced steps that institutions can sustain over time.

"We can cut the big blocks into achievable activities… sustainability is not a one-off… it's a journey." – Kenya

6 Conclusion and recommendations

The insight board convened to inform the reactivation of the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Centre for Excellence in Africa and brought together pharmacy educators and professional leaders from different parts of the continent to identify needs, opportunities, and priorities that could inform the future direction of the Centre. While participants reflected diverse national and institutional contexts, several common priorities and gaps emerged from the discussion.

Key themes emerging from the insight board included:

- Ensuring broad regional, linguistic and institutional representation in the development and governance of the Centre.
- Strengthening opportunities for schools of pharmacy across Africa to engage in the Centre and the wider FIP academic network.
- Strengthening alignment and collaboration between pharmacy education, national regulatory systems and other relevant stakeholders.
- Adapting curricula to current and emerging healthcare demands, including digital health and artificial intelligence, antimicrobial stewardship, and interprofessional practice.
- Investing in leadership and advocacy development for academic leaders.
- Embedding sustainability, local ownership and accessible approaches to participation within the Centre's activities.

Table 1 sets out the proposed priorities for the reactivated Centre. It distinguishes the priorities for FIP to support through the Centre from the needs that institutions identified for themselves, which will be validated through the Nanjing self-assessment tool.

Priorities for FIP to support through the Centre	Self-assessed institutional needs (to be validated)
1. Language inclusivity	1. Artificial intelligence in teaching and research
2. Engagement across all subregions	2. Antimicrobial stewardship competencies
3. Accessible AIM membership	3. Quality assurance and recognition
4. Early engagement of regulators	
5. Collaboration between associations and universities	

Table 1: Proposed priorities for the reactivated FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Centre for Excellence in the African region

Following the insight board, the FIP team mapped the priorities raised during the discussion against FIP Development Goals. This demonstrated strong alignment with existing areas of FIP's global priorities, particularly:

- Quality assurance (DG3)
- Leadership development (DG6)
- Working with others (DG8)
- Policy development (DG13)
- Antimicrobial stewardship (DG17)
- Digital health (DG20), added to the Centre's scope as a direct result of this discussion.

The reactivation of the FIP–UNESCO UNITWIN Centre for Excellence in Africa provides an opportunity to connect academic institutions across the region around a shared vision for advancing pharmaceutical education and science. Working alongside the African Regional Pharmaceutical Forum, the newly established African Association of Schools of Pharmacy (ASPA), FIP academic institutional members and other stakeholders, the Centre can provide a platform for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and the promotion of quality standards. The main barrier to participation i.e., the cost of AIM membership, is being carefully examined through FIP's plans to review and revise AIM membership fees.

Recommendations from the region to support the advancement of pharmaceutical education and science in Africa include:

1. Conduct a regional baseline of needs and capacity (self-assessment) using relevant FIP tools and other relevant evidence to identify priority development areas and inform the Centre's activities and resource allocation.
2. Explore approaches to broadening institutional participation in the Centre and FIP's academic network, taking into account the financial and institutional circumstances of schools of pharmacy across the region.
3. Convene African deans of schools of pharmacy in partnership with ASPA to define regional priorities, strengthen the Centre's constituency, and ensure that governance structures reflect the continent's linguistic, regional, and institutional diversity.
4. Embed antimicrobial stewardship, digital health and artificial intelligence, and interprofessional practice competencies in programme learning outcomes and assessment, with contextualised guidance for different practice settings.
5. Engage national pharmacy regulators from the beginning of the Centre's planning and implementation and pursue a recognised mark of quality for African schools of pharmacy to support graduate mobility and international recognition.

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