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## NIGERIAN BODY BANS PRODUCTS FROM 30 INDIAN, CHINESE, PAKISTANI FIRMS

For indulging in unethical practices, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has banned 30 Indian, Chinese and Pakistani firms' products in the country.

The agency's director-general, Prof Dora Akunyili, who disclosed this to The Guardian in an exclusive interview in Abuja, posited that the menace of fake drugs was being tackled from the very source, which according to her, is often the country of manufacture.

She added: "For now, we have banned 30 Indian and Chinese companies and one Pakistani firm for flouting our regulations. Before we register these companies, we ensure that the drug, food or cosmetics pass through the right laboratory processes so that what the manufacturers are claiming on the label would be what the products contain.

"And even after registration, we do constant surveillance in the markets and shops to make sure that what they are producing for our people or importing is the same thing they registered."

She explained further: "We have independent analysts in India and China whose job is to re-certify drugs before they are exported to Nigeria. We make sure that before a drug, food, cosmetics is registered in Nigeria, we diligently make sure, through their Ministry of Trade or Commerce that such product is used in the country of production and authenticated by our embassy."

"We also make sure that we have pre-shipment information of any drug before it is accepted in Nigeria. We also use the Nigerian banks to make sure that drug, food and cosmetics importers must get clearance from NAFDAC before any bank can process their financial import documents."

Akunyili stated that NAFDAC would, as from June this year, mount total ban on the administration of Novalgin and Chloroquine on malaria patients. She provided more insight into the reigning controversies that have surrounded the directive since it was made known to the public last year.

Her words: "We are supposed to have enforced it totally by December (last year) but the companies came up and pleaded that we should give them more time and we felt that working with these companies to ensure smooth implementation is better for us and members of the public. If we insist on forcing our way, the affected companies would hide the products and be selling them behind our back and we do not want that to happen. That is why we gave them extra six months and after this grace, the enforcement is expected to be total."

According to her, Nigerians have been sensitised to know what product is good or otherwise for their health as government has approved another first line of treatment

for malaria parasite infection in the country."

What is more important now is that Nigerians have been sensitised enough to know that this is not good for them. I think that aspect of social marketing is even better than enforcement. Just as we know that certain food items are not good for the body and run away from such, people are increasingly being aware that there are some products that are injurious to their health. We have continually say that no nurse or doctor has any right to administer drug on anybody without his/her consent."

Prior to our campaign, people were given drugs without them knowing what they are being given. People should reject any alien drug prescribed to them by any medical personnel," she added.

Akunyili assured that the changes that had taken place in the agency would be sustained even after her tenure, saying that the operative structure of NAFDAC had been institutionalised in the last five years.

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