AFRICA IN FOCUS: A STRATEGIC HUB DRIVING GLOBAL CLINICAL DEVELOPMENT

Authors: Mirera J.[1,2], Mwangi A.[2], Kathambi W.[1], Irungu M.[1], Wamaitha E.[1], Githua J.[1], Obwanga C.[2], Brichot P.[2], Ba M.[2], Fforde N.[2], Hoffman T.[2], Bearpark T.[2], Johnson S.[2]

Affiliations:

1. Clinical Research Health Network (CREA-N), Machakos, Kenya
2. PCMG: Empowering Quality, Unity & African Leadership in trials-EQUAL-Africa

Background

Africa carries approximately 25% of the global disease burden yet hosts only about 4% of global clinical trials, limiting evidence generation and the applicability of clinical research findings across diverse populations. This practice-based assessment evaluated Africa's readiness for greater participation in global clinical development through analysis of global stakeholder perspectives, operational experience from African trial settings, and alignment with the WHO 2024 Guidance for Best Practices for Clinical Trials.

Method

Evidence was synthesized from global policy frameworks, insights from the Pharmaceutical Contract Management Group (PCMG) Assembly 2025, operational experience across African clinical trial settings, and a cross-sectional survey on WHO guidance awareness and implementation among clinical trial professionals.

Results

Four key readiness domains emerged: regulatory pathways, site infrastructure, digital systems, and community engagement. At PCMG Assembly 2025, 73% of delegates reported a positive perception shift demonstrating growing global recognition of Africa’s research potential. Barriers like regulatory fragmentation, infrastructure inequities, and sponsor hesitancy, were structural and perception-driven, not fundamental. Four enablers stood out: contextualized expansion models, stronger site-sponsor-vendor networks, digitally enabled systems with change management, and institutionalized community engagement. Survey findings showed that 32% of sites were fully aligned and 52% partially aligned with WHO guidance prior to formal publication of the guidance.

Conclusion

Africa's readiness challenge is no longer feasibility but of scale, predictability, and sustainability. With continued investment, regulatory harmonization, and equitable partnerships, Africa is positioned as a strategic hub for more inclusive, efficient, and globally relevant clinical development.