South Korean Pharma Going Global: How Korean Drugmakers Are Expanding into the Middle East and Africa — and How the HERMS AI Model Accelerates Market Access

South Korean pharmaceutical companies — Daewoong, Hanmi, HK inno.N, SK Biopharmaceuticals, Boryung, Korea United Pharm, Korea Pharmbio and others — are expanding into the Middle East and Africa. See who is already exporting, why the region matters, and how the HERMS AI model supports faster, governed market entry.

Introduction: Why Korean Pharma Is Looking to the Middle East and Africa

South Korean biotech and pharmaceutical companies are speeding up their move into the Middle East as oil-rich countries look for new growth engines beyond fossil fuels, according to Korea Economic Daily (KED Global). Saudi Arabia is the largest pharmaceutical market in the Middle East, yet it relies mostly on imported medicines, and the Korean share was below 1% at the time of President Yoon Suk-yeol's state visit, according to the Asia Business Daily. Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety signed an MOU with Saudi Arabia to support Korean export expansion there.

Korean companies are also looking beyond their current export base. A report by the Korea International Trade Association, summarised by Venture Square, identifies a structure centred on general-purpose treatments and middle-income markets as a limitation and recommends moving toward products with higher technological entry barriers. Innovative drugs and biologics in new regions are the natural next step.

Which South Korean Pharma Companies Are Already Active in the Middle East and Africa?

Daewoong Pharmaceutical

- Daewoong launched its botulinum toxin Nabota in Saudi Arabia in 2025 — see BioSpectrum Asia. According to The Korea Herald (Herald Business), Nabota began shipping to Kuwait in July 2026, giving Daewoong exports to seven Middle East countries: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, Bahrain and Kuwait.
- Daewoong signed a finished-product supply contract with Acino for its diabetes drug Enblo (enavogliflozin) covering eight MENA countries — Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq and Egypt — with a 10-year term from first commercialisation and a Saudi launch planned for the first half of 2027. The company describes it as the first Korean SGLT-2 inhibitor diabetes drug to enter the Middle East and Africa — see KorMedi. Daewoong says it will broaden its reach to the Middle East and Africa after its Latin American deals — see Asia Business Daily.

Hanmi Pharmaceutical

- Hanmi signed an exclusive licensing agreement with Saudi Arabia's Tabuk Pharmaceuticals to export its innovative drugs to the Middle East and North Africa — see Sharikat Mubasher. Korean-language coverage by Bio Spectator adds that Tabuk has sales capability in 17 countries and that urology products and oncology biologics are the priority items.

HK inno.N

- HK inno.N signed an export contract with Tabuk Pharmaceuticals for its reflux drug K-CAB in the MENA region; K-CAB has been exported, as technology transfer or finished product, to 45 countries since its 2019 launch — see KED Global.

SK Biopharmaceuticals

- SK Biopharmaceuticals partnered with Hikma MENA FZE to introduce its epilepsy drug cenobamate into the Middle East and North Africa — see KED Global.

Boryung

- Boryung agreed a five-year deal with South Africa's Kiara Health to supply cancer drugs worth KRW 7.8 billion (US$6.93 million) to 10 African countries, including South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia — see BioWorld.

Korea United Pharm

- Korea United Pharm signed a formal supply contract with Saudi companies after Saudi Arabia strengthened its import regulations; it had previously exported anticancer drugs through unregistered tenders since 2012, and its Sejong 2 anticancer plant received Saudi GMP approval. The company chose Saudi Arabia as its base for entering the wider Middle East and Africa — see KED Global and the Korean report in Dailypharm.

Korea Pharmbio, Samchundang and others

- Korea Pharmbio signed a supply contract for its Urolex tablets with UAE distributor Ashro Drug Store in November 2026, its first entry into the Middle East after exporting to about ten countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa — see Dailypharm and Dailymedi.
- Samchundang signed a five-year exclusive supply and distribution contract with an Iraqi partner for a single-use eye drop, with consulting support from the Korea Health Industry Development Institute — see Asia Business Daily.
- JW Holdings, Chong Kun Dang Holdings, Boryung and BC World Pharm signed an MOU with Saudi firm Sudair Pharmaceutical, and JW planned an infusion solution plant in Sudair as the first Korean pharmaceutical plant in the MENA region — see The Korea Herald.

Regulatory Doors Are Opening

Nigeria's regulator has recognised Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety as a reference authority for vaccines and medical devices, which is expected to simplify and speed up registration of Korean-made products — see Dailypharm. Dailypharm also reports that Korean pharma's key Middle East export countries are Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE, with Iraq also significant — see Dailypharm (English).

Why Entry Is Still Hard: Registration, Partners and Tenders

The Korea United Pharm case shows how quickly the rules can change: unregistered tenders gave way to formal registration and GMP approval once Saudi regulations tightened. Korean companies also depend heavily on local partners such as Tabuk, Hikma, Acino and Kiara Health, which makes partner selection, licensing scope and country-by-country registration sequencing critical. Each market also applies its own pricing rules, tender procedures, import conditions and pharmacovigilance obligations, and many of these rules are unwritten.

- Registration: dossier expectations, query patterns and review cycles differ by authority.
- Market access and pricing: reimbursement, pricing references and tender behaviour vary by market.
- Tenders: eligibility rules and buyer behaviour determine who can bid and win.
- Supply and compliance: import readiness, quality, pharmacovigilance and promotional compliance must work together.

How the HERMS AI Model Supports Korean Pharma Expansion

HERMS is a Dubai-based healthcare and life sciences intelligence company. The HERMS AI model is architected from the 25 HERMS assets, with launch planned for 2027, and is designed to help companies — including Korean pharmaceutical companies — enter and grow in new markets faster and with more certainty. HERMS addresses the fragmentation across marketing, market access, regulatory, supply and logistics, pharmacovigilance, compliance and cross-functional quality.

- Decodes unwritten local rules: turns each market's regulatory, pricing and tender rules into machine-readable logic, so a company sees what is required before it enters.
- Faster registration readiness: checks submissions against local requirements to reduce dossier rework and query cycles.
- Market-access and pricing intelligence: shows how tenders, reimbursement and pricing behave market by market.
- Tender intelligence: tracks government and institutional tenders and their eligibility rules to target the right buyers early.
- Supply and compliance in one flow: import readiness, quality, pharmacovigilance and promotional compliance governed together.

- Governed AI you can audit: the model proposes, the rules engine decides, and the audit trail records both.
- Data residency is the client's choice: data can stay on the client's own servers, with controlled in-place access for the HERMS software and AI model, or be stored on HERMS servers if the client elects. HERMS reads and never overwrites your systems of record.
- Local judgment from Dubai: a single point of entry for the region, built on 28 years of regional execution experience.

Conclusion

Korean pharma is moving from first licensing deals to multi-country launches across the Middle East and Africa. The winners will be the companies that master local rules, partners, tenders, pricing and supply faster than their competitors. To explore how the HERMS AI model can support your market entry, visit hermsglobal.com.

References and Links

- KED Global — South Korean biotech firms tap Middle East as next key market: https://amp.kedglobal.com/newsView/ked202302060021
- Asia Business Daily — Saudi Arabia: from barren land to land of opportunity: https://www.asiae.co.kr/en/article/2023102408290309344
- Venture Square — Korean pharmaceutical export structure (KITA report): https://www.venturesquare.net/en/1111773/
- BioSpectrum Asia — Daewoong introduces NABOTA in Saudi Arabia: https://www.biospectrumasia.com/article/pdf/25563
- Herald Business — Daewoong's Nabota enters Kuwait: https://mbiz.heraldcorp.com/article/10825214
- KorMedi — Daewoong Enblo MENA export contract (Korean): https://kormedi.com/?p=2830485
- Asia Business Daily — Daewoong Enblo Latin America deals: https://www.asiae.co.kr/en/article/2025111408585057403
- Sharikat Mubasher — Hanmi pacts with Tabuk Pharmaceuticals: https://en.sharikatmubasher.com/media-hub/news/21443324/hanmi-partners-with-tabuk-pharmaceuticals-to-expand-into-mena?lang=en
- Bio Spectator — Hanmi and Tabuk MENA partnership (Korean): https://www.biospectator.com/news/view/23278
- KED Global — HK inno.N to release K-CAB in MENA market: https://www.kedglobal.com/bio-pharma/newsView/ked202404230009
- KED Global — SK Biopharm and Hikma MENA: https://amp.kedglobal.com/newsView/ked202308180001
- BioWorld — Boryung, Kiara Health to supply cancer drugs to African countries: https://www.bioworld.com/articles/399403-boryung-kiara-health-to-supply-cancer-drugs-to-african-countries
- KED Global — Korea United Pharm signs contract to supply medicines to Saudi Arabia: https://amp.kedglobal.com/newsView/ked202302200017
- Dailypharm — 한국유나이티드제약, 사우디 수출 계약 (Korean): https://dailypharm.com/user/news/31093

- Dailypharm — Korea Pharmbio adds the Middle East to its export map: https://dailypharm.com/user/news/344152
- Dailymedi — 한국팜비오, UAE 의약품 수출 (Korean): https://dailymedi.com/news/news_view.php?wr_id=942217
- Asia Business Daily — K-Pharmaceuticals' Middle East expansion and Samchundang: https://www.asiae.co.kr/en/article/2023102708193654586
- The Korea Herald — Korean firms sign MOU with Sudair Pharmaceutical: https://www.koreaherald.com/article/398910
- Dailypharm — MFDS: Nigeria to fast-track Korean vaccines and devices (Korean): https://www.dailypharm.com/Users/News/NewsView.html?ID=328609
- Dailypharm (English) — Korean pharma exports to the Middle East: https://www.dailypharm.com/eng/user/news/2550
- HERMS — Official Website: https://hermsglobal.com