there is demand from governments in the region.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is yet to approve HCQ as part of the treatment regime for Covid-19, but the drug is being used to treat patients in clinical trials in France and China.

President Yoweri Museveni has been a strong advocate of the drug, terming it an effective solution to the Covid-19 challenge in several of his televised addresses, a position that has earned the endorsement of Uganda’s health professionals. US President Donald Trump has also strongly backed the controversial drug, despite scepticism about its efficacy from his own health officials.

Experts have particularly pointed to HCQ’s harmful side effects, but Cipla claims that these only manifest after long-term use. (East African 12/5)

Telecoms, East Africa: Safaricom net profit jumped 19.5% to Sh74.7bn for the year ended March 2020, extending its lead as East Africa’s most profitable company. This compared to a net profit of Kenyan Shillings 62bn in the year to March 2019. The company said earnings included a Sh3.3bn one-off exceptional gain arising from acquisition of the M-Pesa brand.

Safaricom made more money than the top 10 banks combined. Its service revenue grew 4.8% to Sh251.2bn, meaning it was generating revenues of Sh20.9bn every month on average or Sh690bn daily. The earnings promise its shareholders, among them the government, another windfall in dividends.

The company said the profits were mainly driven by M-Pesa revenue, which grew by 12.6% to Sh84.4bn (33.6% of service revenue), and mobile data, which increased by 12.1% to Sh40.67bn.

These were the first results incoming chief executive officer Peter Ndewgwa had announced. He will be under pressure to match this performance or better it despite coming in when Kenya is battling the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ndewgwa sees the pandemic as giving the telco a chance “to leverage its digital and data capability to support customers and community during this period and through the recovery process.

“We will focus on developing a range of digital products and services that will provide sustainable solutions to challenges in sectors like agriculture, health, education and essential services,” he said. (Daily Nation 30/4)

Vehicles, Africa: South Korean carmaker Kia announced it would shut down its assembly line in in the town of Batna, northeast of the capital Algiers, from May 17th due to supply chain disruptions after authorities imposed a ban on the import of spare parts.

Around 1,200 people were employed at Batna, where production was launched in 2018 with a reported capacity of around 50,000 vehicles, although not

Industry Assistance During the Pandemic

Throughout the continent companies large and small are providing funds and creative endeavours in support of efforts to minimise the impact of Covid-19. Here are some recently-reported examples.

Beverages: The Coca-Cola Foundation, the Coca-Cola Franchise in Kenya and its bottling partner Coca-Cola Beverages Africa (CCBA) have contributed over Kenyan Shillings 30m (approximately $300,000) worth of support to Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO), Kenya Red Cross and Amref Health Africa to bolster their efforts towards curbing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya.

The support is in the form of financial aid; assistance in distribution of sanitizers produced by Kenya Pipeline Company (KPC); and Coca-Cola beverage product donations to medical facilities. Kenya is among 13 African countries in East and Central Africa receiving donations from Coca-Cola. (coca-colacompany.com; africabusinesscommunities.com 30/4)

E-commerce: Naspers first shipment of personal protective equipment (PPE), consisting of 275,600 KN95 masks and 100,000 face shields, has arrived in South Africa, the first of multiple shipments that will be distributed to frontline healthcare workers. It follows the company’s commitment of Rand 1.5bn in emergency aid to the country.

Naspers is contributing R500m to the Solidarity Response Fund and is procuring R1bn worth of PPE and other medical supplies through its partnerships with Ten- cent and the Chinese government. (naspers.com; africabusinesscommunities.com 23/4)

Food: The Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc (FMN), Nigeria’s food and Agro-allied group, owners of the iconic Golden Penny Foods brand has contributed Naira 2bn (approximately $55m) across the country in the fight against Covid-19. This money is made up of N1bn in cash and another N1bn in food relief materials and medical equipment.

In addition to cash donations and food relief products, FMN will also be providing medical aid through the donation of medical equipment and kits. FMN is importing Covid-19 Pharmaceuticals and Equipment including about 35,000 units of Covid-19 testing kits, 75 ventilators and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for 10,000 medical and emergency workers. (finnpool.com; africabusinesscommunities.com 21/4)

Social Media: Facebook has expanded its Coronavirus Information Centre to nearly all countries in Africa. It features at the top of Facebook’s News Feed, providing a central place for people to keep informed about the pandemic. It includes real-time updates from national health authorities and global organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), as well as helpful articles, videos and posts about social distancing and preventing the spread of Covid-19. (facebook.com; africabusinesscommunities.com 15, 24/4)

Meanwhile TikToks will contribute US$10m to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance to support Gavi’s response to the pandemic in lower-income countries in Africa. The donation will be matched by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through the Gavi Matching Fund, a public-private funding mechanism to support Gavi programmes. Gavi was established in 2000 to ensure new and underused vaccines are quickly made available to prevent infectious diseases and strengthen global health security. Gavi has supported 496 vaccine introductions and campaigns in the world’s 73 poorest countries and established global vaccine stockpiles against major health threats, such as Ebola. (Gavi.org; tiktok.com; africabusinesscommunities.com 1/5)

Technology: Egyptian tech company Giza Systems has begun 3-D printing face shields. The company uses digital printing technology mainly to produce assistive devices for people with disabilities, working in a lab called Project Nitrous. It designed a face shield that can be printed in plastic, cut out by laser and simply assembled, and started delivering the devices to thousands of doctors, free of charge. The firm is now distributing around 2,000 face shields a day to medics nationwide and has partnerships with around 25 public and private hospitals. (© AFP 28/4 2020)

A Rwandan digital fabrication laboratory, Fab Lab, has built a working prototype of a 360-degree sanitising tunnel, marking the first ever of its kind in Rwanda’s ongoing fight against the coronavirus. Resembling a door frame metal detector, the machine is equipped with motion sensors. It sprays a 360-degree mist of foggy hydrogen peroxide (H2O2) in an automated response to human movement. With a 90% disinfection effect, the machine has a sterilisation capacity of 1,000 people per day and can be used in any environment such as hospitals, supermarkets, and schools. (New Times 4/5)

A South African company that manufactures 3-D ‘podz’ has developed a Covid-19 isolation facility that it says can be used in hospitals and other health care facilities. Warren Bosman, the CEO at Oracle 3D, said the company had previously developed smoking and baby-changing podz, which were well received at shopping malls and other public spaces. (Sowetan Johannesberg 13/4)