BALANCING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS WITH ACCESS TO MEDICINES: ROLE OF COMPULSORY LICENSING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES

Sandra Sunny Otta, LLM (Corporate and Commercial Law), Christ Deemed to be University, Bangalore

ABSTRACT

The interplay between intellectual property rights (IPR) and public health has been a long-standing issue in global health policy. While patents incentivize pharmaceutical innovation, they often create barriers to access for life-saving medicines, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Compulsory licensing (CL) is a legal mechanism that allows governments to override patent rights under specific conditions to ensure affordable access to medicines. This paper explores the legal frameworks governing compulsory licensing at the international and national levels, with a focus on the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and the Doha Declaration. It analyzes key national implementations in countries such as India, Brazil, Thailand, South Africa, and the United States, examining how different jurisdictions have utilized compulsory licensing to address public health crises.

The paper further examines significant case laws, including *Natco Pharma Ltd. v. Bayer Corporation* (India), *Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of South Africa v. President of South Africa*, and *Bristol-Myers Squibb v. South Africa*, highlighting legal precedents that have shaped the use of compulsory licensing in global health emergencies. Special attention is given to the role of compulsory licensing during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the TRIPS waiver proposal and the challenges faced in implementing CL provisions.

Finally, the paper discusses the future of compulsory licensing, emphasizing the need for stronger international cooperation, local pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity, and transparent policy implementation. While CL remains a crucial tool for ensuring equitable access to medicines, it must be complemented by voluntary licensing agreements, technology transfer initiatives, and alternative incentive structures to strike a balance between innovation and public health. The findings underscore the necessity of a

more flexible, responsive, and equitable global intellectual property regime that prioritizes human health over profit-driven monopolies.

Introduction

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) serve as a catalyst for innovation, providing inventors and pharmaceutical companies with incentives to develop new drugs. The patent system grants exclusive rights to inventors for a specified period, typically 20 years, allowing them to recoup research and development costs and generate profits. These exclusive rights, however, can lead to monopolistic pricing, restricting the availability of essential medicines, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The ethical dilemma arises when life-saving drugs become inaccessible due to high costs, exacerbating healthcare disparities and limiting the fundamental right to health.

This tension between patent protection and public health becomes especially pronounced during global health emergencies such as pandemics. Diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, Ebola, and COVID-19 have underscored the urgency of ensuring equitable access to life-saving medicines and vaccines. Governments must strike a delicate balance between protecting intellectual property rights and prioritizing public health needs. The challenge is further complicated by international trade agreements, pharmaceutical lobbying, and the need for sustainable innovation incentives within the biomedical sector.

Compulsory licensing (CL) emerges as a crucial legal mechanism to address this conflict. Under this framework, governments can authorize the production of patented medicines without the consent of the patent holder, provided certain conditions are met. CL ensures that essential drugs can be manufactured and distributed at affordable prices, making healthcare more accessible. While pharmaceutical companies argue that compulsory licensing undermines innovation by reducing financial incentives for research and development, proponents assert that it is a necessary tool to safeguard public health, particularly in times of crisis.[1]

This paper examines the role of compulsory licensing in striking a balance between IPR protection and access to medicines during global health crises. It explores the legal frameworks that govern compulsory licensing at the international level, national implementations of CL policies, and landmark case laws that have shaped its application. By analyzing these aspects,

[1] Harvard Law Review, "Pharmaceutical Patents vs. Public Health: Analyzing the CL Debate," 2020.

the paper aims to highlight the importance of CL as a public health tool and discuss its implications for future global health policies and pharmaceutical regulations.

Legal Framework and International Agreements Governing Compulsory Licensing

1. International Agreements Governing Compulsory Licensing

Compulsory licensing is governed by several international agreements and legal frameworks designed to balance patent rights with public health needs. These frameworks provide guidelines for countries to issue compulsory licenses while adhering to global trade and intellectual property standards.

1. The TRIPS Agreement (1995)

The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO), is the most comprehensive international agreement governing intellectual property rights. Article 31 of TRIPS allows member states to issue compulsory licenses under specific conditions, such as national emergencies, public non-commercial use, and when prior negotiations with the patent holder have failed. However, TRIPS also imposes several restrictions, including the requirement that compulsory licenses be issued primarily for domestic use, which has created challenges for countries with limited pharmaceutical manufacturing capabilities.[2]

TRIPS sets the minimum standard for IP protection across WTO member states. However, its rigid structure often makes it difficult for developing nations to implement compulsory licenses without facing potential trade-related consequences. Countries that attempt to issue CLs without following strict procedural guidelines risk legal retaliation from patent holders and trade disputes with developed economies. As a result, while TRIPS provides a legal avenue for compulsory licensing, its procedural complexities often discourage nations from fully utilizing it.[3]

2. Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health (2001)

Recognizing the limitations of TRIPS in addressing public health crises, the Doha Declaration was adopted in 2001 to reaffirm the rights of WTO members to prioritize public health over patent protections. The declaration clarified that each country has the discretion to determine

[2] WTO, "TRIPS Agreement and Public Health," WTO Report, 2015.
[3] UNDP, "IP Rights and Human Rights: The Need for a Balanced Approach," 2019.

what constitutes a national emergency and emphasized that TRIPS should be interpreted in a manner that supports access to medicines for all.[4]

The Doha Declaration played a crucial role in enabling countries to issue compulsory licenses for life-saving medicines without fear of legal repercussions from pharmaceutical companies or trade partners. It marked a significant step in expanding the legal justifications for compulsory licensing, particularly for countries facing epidemics like HIV/AIDS and malaria. The declaration also encouraged WTO members to adopt domestic policies that facilitate the use of CLs in situations where essential medicines are priced beyond the reach of the population.[5]

3. TRIPS Article 31bis and the 2003 WTO Decision

Initially, TRIPS required that medicines produced under compulsory licensing be used predominantly in the domestic market of the issuing country. This restriction posed challenges for nations lacking pharmaceutical manufacturing capabilities. In 2003, the WTO introduced Article 31bis, which allowed the export of medicines produced under compulsory licenses to countries with limited manufacturing capacity.[6]

This amendment was critical in improving access to medicines for developing countries. Under Article 31bis, a country that lacks manufacturing facilities can request pharmaceutical products from another WTO member state that has issued a compulsory license. This provision enables more equitable global distribution of essential medicines and helps developing countries meet their public health obligations.[7] However, despite this provision, bureaucratic obstacles and trade pressures have limited the effective use of Article 31bis.

4. The Role of the World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO has been a strong advocate for compulsory licensing as a tool to enhance global health equity. Through its various programs and policy recommendations, the WHO has encouraged nations to implement TRIPS flexibilities effectively. The organization also collaborates with other global entities to provide technical assistance and legal guidance to countries seeking to issue compulsory licenses during health emergencies.[8]

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[4] WTO, "Doha Declaration: Key Provisions and Implications," WTO Policy Review, 2003.
[5] WHO, "Implementation of Doha Declaration in National Legislation," WHO Policy Paper, 2018.
[6] WTO, "Article 31bis: Enhancing Access to Medicines," 2019
[7] European Commission, "TRIPS Flexibilities and Access to Affordable Medicines," 2021.
[8] WHO, "Compulsory Licensing in the Context of Global Health Emergencies," WHO Technical Report, 2022.

WHO's role extends beyond advocacy; it has actively facilitated global negotiations to ensure that essential medicines reach the populations that need them the most. WHO's involvement in compulsory licensing discussions has helped shape policies that support a balance between protecting pharmaceutical patents and ensuring public health remains a priority. Additionally, WHO provides crucial data and legal frameworks that assist countries in making informed decisions regarding CL implementation.[9]

5. Regional Trade Agreements and Compulsory Licensing

In addition to WTO agreements, regional trade agreements also impact compulsory licensing policies. Some agreements, such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and the European Union's free trade agreements, impose stricter intellectual property protections that may limit the ability of signatory countries to issue compulsory licenses. These agreements often include provisions that extend patent terms or introduce data exclusivity measures, further complicating efforts to improve access to essential medicines.[10]

Regional trade agreements sometimes introduce provisions that go beyond TRIPS requirements, restricting the ability of developing countries to fully utilize compulsory licensing mechanisms. In some cases, countries that enter into these agreements face added pressure from developed economies to strengthen IP protections, reducing the feasibility of issuing CLs during public health emergencies.[11]

6. The Impact of Bilateral and Multilateral Trade Negotiations

Bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations often influence how countries approach compulsory licensing. Nations with strong pharmaceutical industries, such as the United States and members of the European Union, frequently advocate for stringent IP protections in trade agreements. These protections can create barriers for developing countries seeking to implement compulsory licensing policies. However, international advocacy efforts, led by organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Global Fund, have pushed for greater flexibility in trade negotiations to accommodate public health concerns.[12]

As a result of these trade negotiations, some countries have faced direct economic retaliation for issuing compulsory licenses. For instance, Thailand experienced trade-related

[9] UN Human Rights Council, "Right to Health and Patent Protections: A Legal Analysis," 2020.
[10] WTO, "Regional Trade Agreements and Pharmaceutical Patents," WTO Working Paper, 2020.
[11] Harvard Law School, "The Impact of Trade Agreements on Global Health Policies," 2021.
[12] UNCTAD, "Bilateral Trade and the Regulation of Compulsory Licensing," 2018

consequences after issuing compulsory licenses for cancer and HIV drugs, highlighting the ongoing challenges associated with balancing trade interests with public health needs.[13]

2. National Implementations of Compulsory Licensing

Countries have tailored their compulsory licensing laws based on their specific legal frameworks and healthcare priorities. While TRIPS sets the minimum standard, domestic laws define the application and enforcement mechanisms.

a) India

India has one of the most robust compulsory licensing frameworks under the Indian Patents Act, 1970. Section 84 of the Act allows compulsory licensing based on the following grounds:

- The reasonable requirements of the public are not met.
- The patented invention is not available at an affordable price.
- The patented invention is not worked in India (i.e., it is not manufactured domestically).

India's landmark compulsory licensing case, *Natco Pharma Ltd. v. Bayer Corporation*, exemplifies how the country leverages compulsory licensing to ensure drug affordability.[14]

b) Brazil

Brazil's Industrial Property Law (1996) empowers the government to grant compulsory licenses in cases of national emergency or public interest. Brazil has used this provision effectively to secure lower prices for HIV/AIDS treatments, leading to significant reductions in treatment costs.[15]

c) Thailand

Thailand has a well-documented history of using compulsory licensing to make essential drugs more affordable. The country issued compulsory licenses for several HIV/AIDS and cancer drugs between 2006 and 2008, drawing both international praise and criticism from pharmaceutical corporations.[16]

[13] Oxfam, "Global Advocacy for Access to Medicines," Oxfam Policy Report, 2020.
[14] The Patents Act, No. 39 of 1970, § 84 (India).
[15] World Health Organization, Brazil's Experience with Compulsory Licensing for HIV Drugs, WHO Policy Paper (2010).
[16] Médecins Sans Frontières, Thailand's Battle for Affordable Medicines, MSF Report (2007).

d) South Africa

South Africa faced a major legal battle over its Medicines and Related Substances Act, which allowed for flexible patent policies to enable compulsory licensing. The legal disputes culminated in the *Bristol-Myers Squibb v. South Africa* case, where public health advocacy played a critical role in shaping pharmaceutical patent laws.[17]

e) United States and European Union Policies

While compulsory licensing is more commonly used by developing nations, developed countries have also invoked it during emergencies. The U.S. Bayh-Dole Act (1980) allows for march-in rights, enabling the government to use patented inventions if they were developed with public funding and are not reasonably accessible. The European Union has also explored compulsory licensing as part of its COVID-19 response strategy.

Case Laws on Compulsory Licensing and Global Health

1. *Natco Pharma Ltd. v. Bayer Corporation* (India, 2012)

This landmark case was India's first-ever compulsory license under Section 84 of the Indian Patents Act, 1970. The case revolved around Bayer's patented drug Nexavar, used for treating kidney and liver cancer. Bayer priced Nexavar at approximately ₹2.8 lakh per month, making it unaffordable for most Indian patients. Natco Pharma, an Indian generic drug manufacturer, applied for a compulsory license, proposing to sell the drug for ₹8,800 per month, significantly reducing costs. Bayer opposed the compulsory license, arguing that it had invested heavily in R&D and that allowing Natco to manufacture the drug would set a dangerous precedent for patent protection. However, Natco argued that Bayer had failed to meet the reasonable requirements of the public, as stipulated under Indian patent law, and that its pricing was prohibitive for most patients. The Indian Patent Office ruled in favor of Natco, holding that Bayer had failed to make the drug available at an affordable price and in sufficient quantities. Bayer was awarded a 6% royalty on Natco's sales. The decision set a precedent for future compulsory licenses in India and reaffirmed public health priorities over commercial patent rights. Bayer challenged the ruling but was unsuccessful, further solidifying India's stance on compulsory licensing.[18]

[17] Medicines and Related Substances Act 101 of 1965 (S. Afr.).
[18] Natco Pharma Ltd. v. Bayer Corp., (2012) Intellectual Property Appellate Board (India).

This case strengthened India's reputation as a global leader in generic medicine production and demonstrated how compulsory licensing can be used to increase access to life-saving drugs in developing nations.

2. *Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of South Africa v. President of South Africa* (2001)

During the late 1990s, South Africa was facing a severe HIV/AIDS crisis, with millions of citizens unable to afford life-saving antiretroviral drugs. To address this crisis, the South African government passed the Medicines and Related Substances Control Amendment Act in 1997, which allowed for parallel imports and compulsory licensing of essential medicines. In response, 39 multinational pharmaceutical companies, led by the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PMA), sued the South African government in 2001, arguing that the new law violated TRIPS and property rights. The case drew global attention, leading to massive public protests and pressure from international organizations, including the WHO and UNAIDS. Faced with overwhelming public backlash, the pharmaceutical companies withdrew the lawsuit in April 2001. This marked a significant victory for public health advocates and reinforced the right of governments to issue compulsory licenses to address national health emergencies.[19]

The case set a global precedent for using compulsory licensing in response to public health crises and demonstrated the power of international advocacy in shaping pharmaceutical policies.

3. *European Union: WTO Waiver Proposal (2020-2022)*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, India and South Africa proposed a temporary waiver on IPR protections for vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics at the WTO. The proposal aimed to allow developing countries to manufacture COVID-19 vaccines without facing legal barriers imposed by pharmaceutical patents. The proposal was initially supported by the U.S. and over 120 countries but faced strong opposition from the European Union, the UK, and Switzerland, which argued that it would undermine innovation and discourage pharmaceutical investment in future pandemics. After lengthy negotiations, a limited waiver agreement was reached in June 2022, allowing for some flexibility in vaccine production but falling short of a full waiver.

[19] Pharm. Mfrs. Association of South Africa v. President of South Africa, Case No. 4183/98 (High Ct. Pretoria 2001).

The case remains a significant example of how global health crises can influence IP regulations and compulsory licensing frameworks, highlighting the tensions between public health needs and patent rights.

2. *Eli Lilly and Co. v. Government of Canada* (NAFTA Dispute, 2017)

Eli Lilly, a major U.S. pharmaceutical company, brought a case against Canada under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) after Canadian courts invalidated its patents for two drugs. Eli Lilly contended that Canada's patent standards, which required proof of a drug's utility at the time of filing, violated its intellectual property rights and unfairly denied its patent protections.[20]

The tribunal ruled against Eli Lilly, affirming Canada's right to set its own patent standards in the public interest. This case underscored the broader tensions between pharmaceutical patent holders and national policies aimed at promoting access to affordable medicines. The ruling reinforced the ability of governments to enact measures that prioritize public health without necessarily violating international trade agreements.

3. *Abbott v. Thailand* (HIV/AIDS Drug Licensing Dispute)

In 2006-2007, Thailand issued compulsory licenses for several HIV/AIDS drugs, leading to backlash from pharmaceutical companies such as Abbott. The Thai government justified its actions under TRIPS flexibilities, citing the urgent need to provide life-saving medications at lower costs.[21]

Abbott retaliated by withdrawing new drug applications from the Thai market, arguing that Thailand's actions discouraged pharmaceutical investment and innovation. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) and public health advocates supported Thailand's stance, emphasizing that countries had the right to use compulsory licensing to protect public health. This case highlighted the ongoing struggle between corporate interests and human rights and demonstrated how compulsory licensing could be a crucial tool for ensuring equitable access to essential medicines.

5. *Bristol-Myers Squibb v. South Africa* (2001 Pharmaceutical Lawsuit)

South Africa, facing a severe HIV/AIDS crisis, amended its patent laws in the late 1990s to

[20] Eli Lilly & Co. v. Government of Canada, ICSID Case No. UNCT/14/2 (NAFTA Arb. Trib. 2017).
[21] Abbott v. Thailand, WTO Dispute DS408 (World Trade Organization 2011).

allow compulsory licensing and parallel imports of affordable generic medicines. In response, 39 pharmaceutical companies, including Bristol-Myers Squibb, filed a lawsuit against the South African government, arguing that these measures violated international patent agreements.[22]

The lawsuit provoked global outrage, with public health advocates and civil society organizations condemning the pharmaceutical industry for prioritizing profits over human lives. Under intense pressure, the pharmaceutical companies eventually withdrew the lawsuit in 2001. The case marked a significant victory for public health advocacy and reinforced the legitimacy of compulsory licensing as a tool for addressing global health crises.

Compulsory Licensing in the Context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented global health emergency, highlighting the need for equitable access to vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics. The rapid spread of the virus and the overwhelming demand for medical resources placed immense pressure on healthcare systems worldwide. While pharmaceutical companies developed vaccines and treatments at an accelerated pace, access to these critical resources remained a significant challenge, particularly for developing countries. Compulsory licensing emerged as a potential solution to address the inequitable distribution of medical technologies.[23]

1. Early Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis

Governments and international organizations recognized the urgency of ensuring widespread access to COVID-19 treatments. Several countries invoked compulsory licensing provisions to facilitate the production of vaccines and medicines. Countries such as Canada, Germany, Chile, and Israel swiftly amended their patent laws or issued emergency compulsory licenses to authorize the use of patented treatments without the consent of the patent holders.[24]

For instance, in March 2020, Israel issued a compulsory license to import generic versions of AbbVie's Kaletra (lopinavir/ritonavir), an antiviral drug initially used for treating HIV but repurposed for COVID-19 treatment. Similarly, Canada introduced temporary legislative amendments through the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act, allowing for expedited compulsory licensing of pandemic-related medicines.

[22] Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. v. South Africa, Case No. 4183/98 (High Ct. Pretoria 2001).
[23] World Health Organization, COVID-19 and the Role of Compulsory Licensing, WHO Policy Brief (2021).
[24] Government of Canada, COVID-19 Emergency Response Act, Bill C-13, 2020 (Can.).

2. The TRIPS Waiver Proposal

One of the most significant developments during the pandemic was the proposal by India and South Africa to waive certain provisions of the TRIPS Agreement. The waiver aimed to temporarily suspend patent protections for COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments, allowing countries to manufacture generic versions without facing legal consequences.[25]

The proposal received support from over 100 WTO member states, including the United States. However, opposition from the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland stalled negotiations, with concerns that removing patent protections would discourage future pharmaceutical investments. The eventual agreement reached in June 2022 granted only limited flexibilities for vaccine production, leaving out broader provisions for treatments and diagnostics.[26]

3. Challenges in Implementing Compulsory Licensing During COVID-19

Despite the legal provisions allowing for compulsory licensing, several challenges hindered its widespread implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Pharmaceutical Industry Resistance:** Major pharmaceutical companies opposed compulsory licensing measures, arguing that such actions would undermine innovation and disrupt supply chains. Companies like Pfizer and Moderna advocated for voluntary licensing agreements instead.
- **Bureaucratic and Legal Hurdles:** Many countries lacked the necessary legal frameworks to issue compulsory licenses efficiently. Lengthy administrative processes delayed the issuance of licenses even during emergencies.
- **Manufacturing Capacity Constraints:** Even with compulsory licenses in place, many developing nations lacked the infrastructure and expertise to manufacture vaccines and complex biologics, leading to continued dependence on high-income countries for supplies.
- **Geopolitical and Trade Pressures:** Countries considering compulsory licensing faced pressure from trade partners and international agreements that prioritized strong patent

[25] World Trade Organization, Waiver from Certain Provisions of the TRIPS Agreement for the Prevention, Containment and Treatment of COVID-19, WTO Doc. IP/C/W/669 (2020).
[26] World Trade Organization, Ministerial Decision on the TRIPS Agreement, WTO Doc. WT/MIN(22)/30 (2022).

protections. The fear of economic retaliation deterred some governments from invoking CL provisions.[27]

4. Case Studies of Compulsory Licensing During COVID-19

a) Canada's Emergency Patent Law Amendment

Canada amended its Patent Act in March 2020 to expedite compulsory licensing in response to the pandemic. The new provisions enabled the government to authorize the use of patented medicines, vaccines, and diagnostics without prolonged negotiations with patent holders. However, Canada ultimately relied more on voluntary licensing agreements rather than invoking compulsory licenses extensively.

b) Israel's Use of Compulsory Licensing

Israel became one of the first countries to issue a compulsory license for COVID-19 treatment. The decision to import generic Kaletra was justified based on supply shortages rather than pricing concerns. The move set a precedent for other nations considering similar actions.

c) The European Union's Approach

Although several EU nations expressed interest in compulsory licensing, the bloc primarily relied on bulk purchasing agreements and voluntary licensing arrangements with pharmaceutical companies. The European Commission supported negotiations with manufacturers rather than unilateral CL issuance.

5. The Future of Compulsory Licensing in Pandemic Preparedness

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated both the potential and the limitations of compulsory licensing in addressing global health crises. Moving forward, several lessons can be drawn:

- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Countries should establish clear and efficient processes for issuing compulsory licenses during health emergencies to avoid delays.[28]
- **Expanding TRIPS Flexibilities:** Future WTO negotiations should focus on broader

[27] Global Health Policy Institute, Barriers to Vaccine Manufacturing in Low-Income Countries, GHP Working Paper (2021).
[28] World Trade Organization, The Future of TRIPS and Public Health: Strengthening Compulsory Licensing, WTO Policy Report (2022).

waivers that encompass treatments and diagnostics, not just vaccines.

- **Enhancing Local Manufacturing Capabilities:** Developing nations must invest in pharmaceutical infrastructure to fully benefit from compulsory licensing provisions.
- **Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration between governments, international organizations, and pharmaceutical companies can facilitate fairer licensing agreements and technology transfers.[29]

Conclusion

Compulsory licensing remains a critical mechanism in balancing intellectual property rights with public health needs. The legal frameworks and case laws discussed illustrate how nations have leveraged TRIPS flexibilities to make essential medicines accessible, especially during health crises.

The case studies from India, South Africa, Israel, Thailand, and Canada demonstrate that while pharmaceutical companies and certain governments continue to resist widespread compulsory licensing, legal precedents affirm that public health considerations can take precedence over patent exclusivity. The Natco v. Bayer case in India established affordability as a key criterion for issuing compulsory licenses, while the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association case in South Africa reinforced a nation's right to take proactive measures in combating public health crises.

Despite its advantages, compulsory licensing continues to face resistance from pharmaceutical companies and trade blocs that argue it discourages research and innovation. The fear is that if compulsory licenses become widespread, pharmaceutical companies may reduce their investments in new drug development, thereby slowing medical advancements. This concern highlights the need for a balanced approach—one that encourages pharmaceutical innovation while ensuring that life-saving medicines remain accessible to those in need.[30]

A key takeaway from past cases is that international cooperation and transparent negotiations are essential to ensuring equitable access to medicines worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the urgent need for a more flexible and adaptable compulsory licensing

[29] Global Health Policy Institute, Building Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Capacity in LMICs, GHP Working Paper (2021).
[30] World Bank, Alternative Incentives for Pharmaceutical Innovation: Public Funding and Patent Pooling, World Bank Economic Report (2021).

framework. While some countries have successfully issued compulsory licenses for COVID-19 treatments and vaccines, others have faced political and legal challenges that hinder their implementation. The WTO waiver proposal by India and South Africa, which sought temporary relief from patent restrictions, revealed the complexities of navigating global intellectual property laws during a health crisis.

Moving forward, the international community must work toward strengthening compulsory licensing provisions and expanding TRIPS flexibilities to better address future health crises. Governments should establish clear and expedited procedures for issuing compulsory licenses during emergencies, ensuring that bureaucratic hurdles do not delay access to essential medicines. Additionally, incentives for pharmaceutical companies to participate in voluntary licensing agreements, public-private partnerships, and global health initiatives should be explored to maintain a balance between innovation and accessibility.

In conclusion, while compulsory licensing is not a one-size-fits-all solution, it remains one of the most effective tools available to governments in addressing the challenges posed by global health emergencies. By fostering a balanced, collaborative, and legally sound approach to compulsory licensing, the global community can pave the way for a more just and resilient healthcare system that prioritizes public well-being over profit-driven monopolies.