- *The grant will be used by the world body to equip Regional Member Countries to prevent, rapidly detect, investigate, contain and manage detected cases of COVID-19*

The Board of Directors of the African Development Bank on Tuesday approved $2 million in emergency assistance for the World Health Organization (WHO) to reinforce its capacity to help African countries contain the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigate its impacts.

The grant, which is in response to an international appeal by the WHO, will be used by the world body to equip Regional Member Countries to prevent, rapidly detect, investigate, contain and manage detected cases of COVID-19.

It is one part of several Bank interventions to help member countries address the pandemic which, while slow to arrive in Africa, is spreading quickly and is straining already fragile health systems.

Specifically, the WHO Africa region will use the funds to bolster the capacity of 41 African countries on infection prevention, testing and case management. WHO Africa will also boost surveillance systems, procure and distribute laboratory test kits and reagents, and support coordination mechanisms at national and regional levels.

This grant “will enable Regional Member Countries to put in place robust containment measures within 48 hours of COVID-19 case confirmation and also support the WHO Africa Region to disseminate information and increase public awareness in communities,” said the Bank’s Human Capital Youth and Skills Development Department.

The grant will contribute toward a $50 million WHO Preparedness and Response Plan, which other partners including the United Nations system, are also supporting.

It is estimated that Africa will require billions of dollars to cushion the impact of the disease as many countries scramble together contingency measures, including commercial lockdowns, in desperate efforts to contain it. Globally, factories have been closed and workers sent home, disrupting supply chains, trade, travel, and driving many economies toward recession.

The Bank Group is expected to unveil a financial assistance package that will enable

governments and businesses to undertake flexible responses to lessen the economic and social impact of this pandemic.

Last Thursday, the Bank raised an exceptional $3 billion in a three-year social bond, the proceeds from which will go to help alleviate the economic and social effects of the pandemic. It is the largest dollar-denominated social bond launched in international capital markets to date.