As COVID-19 pandemic continue to pose unprecedented challenges in the deployment of health care products including vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics in Africa, vaccination remains a cornerstone of the response to the spread of infectious diseases.

According to a group of experts and policy makers gathered this week in Tunis, Tunisia on the sidelines of the Eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD8), Africa is still heavily reliant on vaccine donations, with 99% of vaccine doses originating from donations.

TICAD is an open and inclusive forum that brings together African countries and development partners, including international and regional organizations, donor countries, Asian countries, the private sector and civil society organizations, dealing with African development.

Reports indicate that over the past year and a half, the government of Japan contributed to the COVAX vaccine initiative, donating approximately $1bn to the organisation, as well as more than 40m doses of vaccines to Africa.



Boosting research and development

COVAX is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi and the World Health Organization (WHO), alongside key delivery partner UNICEF.

During a session entitled “Exploring ways towards Investing in Vaccine Lifecycle Management in Africa towards Equal Access to Vaccines and Beyond”, delegates stressed the need of support for Africa’s Vaccine Production.

Between April 2020 and May 2021, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) approved loan assistance to promote COVID-19 response based on the concept of human security for some countries in Africa. But experts stressed the need boost capacity for local vaccine production in a move to address current gap in vaccine production capacity.

To seek potential options to enhance vaccine lifecycle management in Africa, this event sheds light on the current progress of vaccine development and deployment

in Africa with a particular focus on successes and challenges in research and development, regulatory systems and manufacturing.

Domestically produced COVID-19 vaccine.

Yet an increasing number of African countries started mass vaccination. Some delegates observed that there is a reason to see light at the end of the tunnel for the continent after some African research centres have acquired through the JICA's initiative for Global Health and Medicine that is now helping them to boost the Covid-19 research capacity

More promising, Prof. Dorothy Yeboah-Manu Director, of Ghanaian-based Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research said that some African countries including Rwanda, Ghana and Senegal are now working to develop a domestically produced COVID-19 vaccine.

As part of these efforts to boost capacity for African countries to deal with COVID-19, The Government of Japan has contributed nearly US$1 million to procure ultra-cold chain equipment, designed to store COVID-19 vaccines at very low temperatures to assist countries in shoring up COVID-19 vaccinations and population immunity.

Throughout the pandemic, Japan shows its commitment t o remain a significant contributor to the COVAX project, led by CEPI, GAVI, the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children's Fund, to monitor and ensure vaccine equity while other economically developed countries were hoarding vital vaccine stocks especially in Africa.

"In order to overcome Covid-19, it is important to promote equitable access to vaccines not only in Japan but also throughout the world," says Ikuo Takizawa, Senior Director, Office for COVID-19 Response, Human Development Department, JICA speaking during a virtual session on the sidelines of TICAD8

Currently Japan's cooperation with Africa focuses on existing technical projects, not only in health but in other sectors like Infrastructure education, water and sanitation, agriculture and nutrition.

Africa and Japan have been engaged in international cooperation since the 1950s. (END)