The largest HIV experiment led by African researchers taking place in Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa has been stopped early after preliminary data suggested it would not be effective in preventing infection, according to the trial's chief Investigation.

Clinical trials named PrePVacc conducted on more than 1,500 people aged between 18 to 40 years began in December 2020 was due to end in 2024, with intension of testing the effectiveness of HIV vaccines together with a new oral pre-exposure prophylaxis vaccines (PrEP) pill in preventing HIV infections.

The news is the latest blow to efforts to find an effective vaccine against a virus that has so far claimed about 40 million lives globally. Another 39 million are living with HIV, the majority of them in Africa.

However, lead researchers say that while there are "no concerns about the safesty of the vaccines," they have now stopped the vaccine component of the clinical trail due to it's ineffectiveness in preventing HIV.

To most scientists, the failure of the experiment vaccines is a huge blow to the medical community.

Although new HIV infections have been reduced dramatically since its peak in the mid-1990s, UNAIDS most recent data outlines that 40 million people currently live with the infection worldwide.

Half of them are women and girls, with young women and girls (15-24) accounting for 77% of new cases in sub-Saharan Africa.

Reflecting on the results, PrEPVacc's Chief Investigator, Pontiano Kaleebu, said in a statement that "we must look to a new generation of vaccine approaches and technology," as well as a "new generation of leaders."

"The development of a vaccine preventing HIV is a critical goal for Africa. It is a goal that must have even greater urgency now that no HIV vaccines are being trialled for efficacy anywhere in the world," Kaleebu urged.

The Director of PrEPVacc, Dr. Eugene Ruzagira, agreed, pointing out that while the "scientific hurdles are high," he has "equally high hopes that a HIV vaccine will be developed one day."

“Important research like PrEPVacc is moving us forward, and participants are willing to step forward with us and make a difference to the health of their communities,” Ruzagira said in a statement, adding that this trial allowed researchers to build good relations with crucial communities.

According to the researchers, the full results of the vaccine component of the PrEPVacc trials are due to be published in the summer of 2024.