

The African Finance Ministers and the World Bank Group met today to fast track vaccine acquisition on the continent and avoid a third wave. In a boost to the African Union's target to vaccinate 60% of the continent's population by 2022, the World Bank and the AU announced that they are partnering to support the Africa Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) initiative with resources to allow countries to purchase and deploy vaccines for up to 400 million people across Africa.

This extraordinary regional effort complements COVAX and comes at a time of rising COVID-19 cases in the region. World Bank financing is available to support the purchase and deployment of doses secured by AVATT.

"The World Bank is very pleased to support African countries through this partnership with the African Union to quickly provide hundreds of millions of doses," said World Bank Group President David Malpass.

"Working together, we can expedite doses to countries and support deployment. Countries urgently need more pathways for acquiring vaccines that match their needs and have early delivery schedules."

"As a result of this joint initiative between the World Bank and African institutions such as the Africa Import Export Bank and the Africa Centre for Disease Control, we now have the capacity to vaccinate at least 400 million people, or 30% of our population of 1.3 billion," said Strive Masiyiwa, African Union Special Envoy and coordinator of the AVATT.

"We really appreciate the extraordinary partnership on this initiative between the AU Vaccine Champion, HE President Cyril Ramaphosa, and David Malpass, the President of the World Bank."

The World Bank has \$12 billion in vaccine financing available to help countries purchase and distribute vaccines and address readiness issues. The World Bank has already approved operations to support vaccine roll out in 36 countries. By end June, the World Bank expects to be supporting vaccination efforts in 50 countries, two thirds of which are in Africa.

The World Bank also has strong partnerships with regional institutions such as the Africa Center for Disease Control, West African Health Organization, and the African Union Commission to enhance cross-border collaboration on disease surveillance, preparedness and response.

The World Bank-financed COVID-19 vaccine operations allow countries to purchase vaccines through COVAX, through regional initiatives, and through bilateral procurement from manufacturers. As such, the Bank has been working closely with AVATT to see that countries in Africa can use World Bank financing to purchase COVID-19 doses through the AVATT initiative as well.

The goal of the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team, which is an initiative of the African Union Commission, Africa CDC, Afreximbank, the AU Special Envoys for COVID-19, and UNECA, is to provide the continent with sufficient and timely access to COVID-19 vaccines.

It has already successfully negotiated 220 million doses of Johnson & Johnson's Janssen (J&J/Janssen) COVID-19 vaccine for use by African countries, with an option for 180 million more based on demand. AVATT works and coordinates closely with the African Ministers of Finance in the efforts towards realizing herd immunity for full reopening of the continent's economies.

"A key priority in this initiative is to make sure the purchase of vaccines translates into people getting vaccinated," noted Vera Songwe, the Executive Secretary of the ECA.

World Bank financing and technical assistance is available to help countries effectively deploy vaccines, including expanding storage and building cold chain, developing tracking systems to make sure vaccines reach people, training health workers and supporting citizen and community engagement to address vaccine hesitancy. Beyond the current emergency, building resilient health systems in Africa that can respond to future pandemics will be key.

In addition, the IFC, the World Bank Group's private sector arm, is leading a consortium to support Africa's regional vaccine production. Work toward investments in South Africa, Senegal, and Rwanda is at an advanced stage.