

Report on a Joint Meeting of Africa Ministers of Health and Finance on the Progress and Status in Controlling the Covid-19 Pandemic and its Economic Shocks

8 July 2020





Introduction

The teleconference joint meeting of Africa Ministers of Health and Finance on the progress and status in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic and economic shocks was held on 3 June 2020.



Attendance

- The following participated in the teleconference: Honourable Ministers of Finance and Health from African Union Member States; H.E. Mr. Mousa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AUC; H.E. Mrs. Amira Elfadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs; H.E. Prof. Victor Harrison, Commissioner for Economic Affairs; H.E. Ambassador Albert Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry; and the AU Special Envoys: Ms. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Dr Donald Kaberuka, Mr Trevor Manuel, and Mr. Abderrahmane Benkhalfa, and Mr. Strive Masiyiwa.
- The following institutions were also represented: Under Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of UNECA, Dr. Vera Songwe, and the President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Afreximbank, Dr. Benedict Okey Oramah.





Opening of the Meeting

- The Teleconference meeting was moderated by H.E Mrs. Amira Elfadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs, AUC. In her opening remarks, she thanked the Honourable Ministers and the special envoys to the African Union for the work done regarding responding to COVID-19 as well as the economic shocks that African economies are facing due to COVID-19. She stressed that since the onset of COVID-19, African Union through Africa CDC has supported member States in the COVID-19 response.
- In his welcoming remarks, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the Commission welcomed participants to the virtual conference aimed to take stock of the progress made so far since the Emergency Ministerial Meeting of African Ministers of Health on COVID-19 held on 22 February 2020. He reiterated his applaud and solidarity to all Member States and Special Envoys for their efforts in tackling the pandemic. The Chairperson emphasized the necessity to mobilize resources to contain the pandemic and counter all pessimistic forecast made about the African continent. He noted that the establishment of the African Union fund for COVID-19 has amounted to about \$9 million out of the \$60 million pledged and stressed the need for the three coordinating committees of the COVID-19 Response Fund – Health, Finance and Transport and Logistics – to work effectively in the areas that concerns them.
- The Chairperson noted that as in most countries of the world, this pandemic poses two challenges in Africa – health and economic recovery. Hence, he urged all Member States to sign the Treaty for the African Medical Agency to facilitate the regulation of medical products and improve access to quality,

safe and efficacious medical products on the continent. On the economic level, H.E. Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat highlighted that the pandemic has created an economic damage to African economies and about \$100 billion is needed for economic recovery. Most Member States have reported the contraction of their economies, and Africa has lost about 2.5% of its GDP with debt being on the increase. There has been 70%-80% loss for oil-based economies because of the fall in global oil prices. Nonetheless, he stated that most Member States have taken budgetary and financial measures and the AUC with the help of the Special Envoys are working on negotiating the issue of debt relief for Member States.

- The Chairperson thanked the AfDB, IMF, World Bank, and other partners for their help during this crisis. He extended his gratitude to Afreximbank for their efforts towards the establishment of the continental platform on procurement of medical supplies and thanked the Africa CDC for the progress made to contain the virus.
- In his welcoming remarks, H.E Prof. Victor Harrison, Commissioner for Economic Affairs AUC, commended African countries for their determination and capacity to contain the pandemic. He recognized that the social and economic consequences of the pandemic is very huge, but Africa is ready to take up the challenge. All Ministers of Health and Finance are ready to help in this situation and the efforts of each Member State is being reflected on the continent. The Commissioner reassured Member States that the battle against the pandemic will be won. He pointed out that the Economic Affairs Department is currently working with the Special Envoys, F15, and partners on the issue of indebtedness and Domestic Resource Mobilization. The department has co-organized Six

(6) virtual conferences with the IMF on the macroeconomic impacts and policy responses COVID-19 pandemic in Africa where the IMF shared its findings and Member States shared their experiences so far.

- To end his remark, H.E. Prof. Victor Harrison reiterated what Professor Jeffrey Sachs stated at the AUC-IMF virtual conference (2 June 2020) – Africa has the know-how qualities to contain epidemics as a result of their previous experiences, hence the continent needs to effectively utilize its know-how qualities to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.



Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted without any amendments.



Update by the Director of Africa CDC, Dr. John Nkengasong, on the Epidemiologic Situation of COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa

- In his presentation Dr John Nkengasong, Director for Africa CDC Provided the updates on the epidemiological situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa and the implementation of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 response, Dr Nkengasong, highlighted that the pandemic has taken momentum in the last few weeks in Africa, and the continent is seeing exponential growth in COVID-19 cases, and exponential growth in deaths in key hotspots. He mentioned that cases could rise as high as 500 million in the next 100 days if not appropriately mitigated; but this number could go as low as 100

million cases if the continent acted to implement recommended containment measures rapidly, massively and collectively.

It was underlined that the continent is lagging behind in terms of number of COVID-19 tests performed on the continent; and articulated that shortages in key supplies like test kits are driving a slow response to the pandemic in Africa, where only 1,667 tests per million population are performed in Africa.

He recalled that Africa CDC' s continental strategy is axed on three pillars, namely, preventing transmission, preventing deaths and preventing social and economic harm; and emphasized the need of commodities procurement to prevent transmission and deaths. He stressed that if we join forces, we can beat the virus on the continent and unlock economies.

“The Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT), the initiative launched by the President of the African Union Commission to Test, Trace and Treat COVID-19 cases will help to ease lockdowns and strengthen COVID-19 response on the continent; as the initiative aims at: (1) conducting increased millions of tests which allow for implementation of targeted measures that will replace lockdowns; (2) deploying 1 million community healthcare workers which will increase tracing and allow for more effective isolation of infected individuals; (3) training one hundred thousand (100,000) healthcare workers for increased treatment which allow for more people to access the medical care that they will need”; said Dr John Nkengasong.

It was underscored that the establishment of a continent-wide procurement platform for laboratory and medical supplies will facilitate pool procurement of these critically needed supplies and will enable testing, tracing and treatment.



Introduction of the Continental Platform on Procurement of Medical Supplies by Mr. Strive Masiyiwa

- In his presentation Mr. Strive Masiyiwa AUC Special Envoy and Executive Chairman of Econet Global introduced the Africa Medical Supplies Platform, a continental platform for the procurement of medical supplies, as part of the resource mobilization update. The platform was developed to help African Union Member States tackle issues on the supply side of continent's response to COVID-19, and is accessible to Heads of State and authorized entities (such as NGOs and non-profits).

The Africa Medical Supplies Platform is a closed, online marketplace with local and international healthcare manufacturers that aims to address the urgent need to procure critical medical equipment and bridge the supply gap in order to help fight the pandemic over the next six months. After discussions with Chinese leadership, the team has successfully secured critical medical equipment to be sold through the platform. Payment processing has been secured through partnerships with leading African and international financial institutions, foundations and corporations; and delivery led by pan-African and national airlines, global retailers, and freight forwarders. As cases continue to rise on the continent, the platform will enable access to critical medical supplies to African governments. AU Member States will be able to register as of 4 June 2020.



Update on the resource mobilization and the ongoing debt relief discussions/ negotiations by Special Envoys

The Special Envoys provided an update on their coordinated initiative in mobilizing resources for the continent to counter the pandemic and economic shocks posed by the virus. They indicated that they have approached and been working closely with the multilateral financiers, including the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), African Development Bank (AfDB), Islamic Bank, and other institutions. They are mapping out a strategy to work with bilateral financiers and private sectors. In addition, the Special Envoys have been working with multilateral institutions on direct resources, which are disbursed directly to the countries by the multilateral and coordinated with the Ministry of Finance. More negotiations are yet to be conducted with the multilateral financiers on Special Drawing Rights to enable an increase in liquidity and moratorium for two years. Moreover, they have requested debt relief, which includes moratorium and debt cancellation for poorer nations, allowing them to use resources to cater to emergency needs and economic recovery. More negotiations are underway on the Special Drawing Rights with multilateral institutions through the IMF to enable the provision of more liquidity for countries, and two years of debt standstill.

S/No.	Institution	Fund committed US\$	Funds disbursed US\$
1.	World Bank (WB)	14 billion	1.5 billion
2.	International Monetary Fund (IMF)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 185.96 million-catastrophic containment relief trust ▪ 4.76 billion rapid credit facility ▪ 8.4 billion – rapid financing instrument ▪ 200 million – other resources to top-up existing facility <p>Total 13 billion</p>
3.	African Development Bank (AfDB)	10 billion	458 million
4.	Islamic Bank	1.3 billion	287 million
5.	Global Fund	1 billion	
6.	Garvey	200 million	31 million

The total committed funds are US\$ 40 billion, and disbursed funds are currently at US\$ 15.3 billion. The Special Envoys underscored that negotiations are underway with the IMF to increase the US\$13 billion disbursed funds to US\$30 billion within six months.



Recommendations

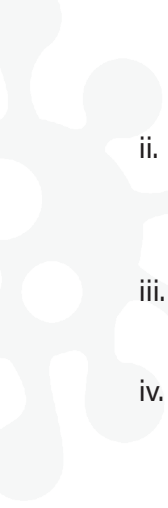
- a. Urge the Finance Ministers to collaborate with the Health Ministers to make use of resources to procure medical supplies and equipment.
- b. Utilize at least half of the US\$15.3 billion available resources to procure medical supplies and improve the health systems.
- c. Optimize on the procurement platform to obtain discounts from supplier and obtain more medical supplies.
- d. Make data viable on the resources that countries received from various financiers.
- e. Encourage the continent to continue with solidarity even beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, as the continental coordinated approaches lead to positive results.



Country Experience Sharing on the ongoing initiative in fighting the pandemic and economic shocks

Egypt

- i. The country at the beginning stage established a command and control centre, where a COVID-19 Hotline was set up. This command centre is made up of 500 agents and 20 medical staff. Here the public can call to report suspected cases, as well as get health notifications regarding the virus.

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- ii. In addition, specialized chest and fever hospitals have been set up, made up of 10,919 health workers, with a bedding capacity of 2245.
 - iii. Testing capacity has also been increased, where the country is now testing 30,000 people per day.
 - iv. Ambulance fleet has also been increased with a current fleet of 1500 ambulances, 2 air ambulance, with 4000 ambulance staff and 1200 logistic staff.
 - v. With regards to designated hospitals to treat the virus, 19 hospitals and 24 hostels nation-wide has been designated, with a bedding capacity of 2604 and 4025, respectively. There are also 543 ICU unites which all have ventilators. For these health facilities a total of 4121 health workers are there to attend to patients.
 - vi. With regards to isolation and contact tracing measures, a total of 18,350 health workers are assisting with this effort.
 - vii. When it comes to key challenges and recommendations, the main challenge is maintaining the capacity of its healthcare facilities and taskforce facing Covid-19 and keeping other healthcare activities at an acceptable level. As far as recommendations are concern, we need to train the community on the new norms, as well as be ready for re-opening of our economies whiles taking the necessary precautions to avoid a second wave.



Recommendations on a continental approach to funding of medical research

- a. We have about 370 pharmaceutical companies, we need to set up a ministerial committee, made up of ministers of health to coordinate a research department of local pharmaceuticals for the continent.
- b. Financing for the local pharmaceutical research should come internal sources
- c. We need to scale up our testing capabilities.
- d. We need to mobilize our community to engage in tracing and treatment of the virus.



Country Experience Sharing on the Coordination between the Ministry of Finance and Health

Rwanda

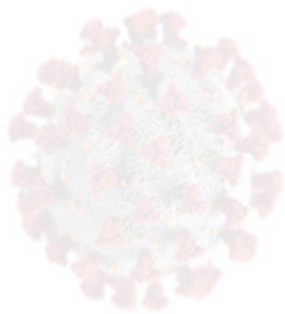
To fight the COVID-19 pandemic both the Ministry of Health and Finance jointly coordinated in: (i) the development of a preparedness and response plan. (ii) the administration and procurement of medical suppliers as well as supporting local production of these medical supplies to allow for a proper response

to the pandemic. (iii) mobilizing resources from different partners (bilateral, multilateral, and private sector willing to contribute to the pandemic), and reallocation of the budget to tackle the pandemic and conduct a review every six months to assess gaps and areas requiring more resources. (iv) the development of an economic recovery plan which includes the development of treatment centres and the construction of a national referral laboratory; and a social protection system to respond to the informal sector. Lastly, the Ministries coordinate in harmonizing with neighbouring countries to share information and collaborate in terms of the use of technology such as robots, drones and the e-banking system banking.



Recommendations

- Strengthen the use of e-banking, particularly mobile banking in conducting daily transaction and avoid velocity of cash to reduce transmission of the virus.





Countries Experience Sharing in the Fight against the Pandemic

The countries have highlighted their numerous concerted efforts to counter the pandemic. In Morocco, a 3 billion Moroccan dirham COVID-19 fund was established to provide immediate support to the Ministry of Health. Cameroun noted that the government is more concerned about social protection initiatives, SMEs, and the private sector and has requested support from multilateral and bilateral organizations. Guinee underscored the scarcity of financial resources in the country and noted support it has received various institutions. The country has been promoting local production and purchase most of its medical suppliers from the African continent. Lesotho indicated that the country was late in recording the infections, with only four infections recorded in the country and testing are done in South Africa. The country emphasized the importance of scaling up its testing and finalizing infrastructure for its testing. Mauritania pointed out that a high-level committee was set up by the Ministry of Health and Finance since the first infection case recorded on 18 March 2020 and a budget reallocation was done to procure medical equipment and suppliers. The country has received donations from various organizations to respond to the pandemic. Sahrawi highlighted that while there are no records of infections, the country is receiving support in terms of preparedness and protection against the pandemic.

- a. Continuation in strengthening the coordination between the Ministry of Finance and Health in fighting pandemics and other diseases.
- b. Scaling up of testing in the continent
- c. Promote local production of medical suppliers in the continent

Recommendations on a Continental Approach to the Funding of Medical Research, by H.E. Prof. Victor Harrison, Commissioner for Economic Affairs

H.E. Prof. Victor Harrison pointed out that as the continent is faced with the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic, medical supplies are required including medicines. He highlighted the scarcity of pharmaceuticals in the continent as currently only 375 pharmaceuticals exist serving 1.3 billion people. He urged countries to consider the utilization of African traditional medicines to cure the virus. He emphasized the importance of establishing a committee of Ministers of Finance and Health to coordinate a continental approach for financing research for pharmaceuticals. The Commissioner concluded by reiterating the significance of investing and promoting local production of medical supplies and equipment.



Closing remarks

- In his closing remarks, Dr. John Nkengasong, Director for Africa CDC expressed his gratitude for the opportunity given to the Africa CDC to co-organize the conference together with the Social Affairs Department and the Economic Affairs Department of the Commission. He concluded by emphasizing on three key messages: (i) Good public health practice in the pandemic is good economy; (ii) The AUC COVID-19 strategy is built on preventing transmission of the pandemic, preventing deaths and preventing social and economic harm on the continent. (iii) For Member States to achieve this, the AUC together with the Africa CDC needs to support and scale up the ability to test, mobilize communities to trace and isolate affected people, and mobilize resources to finance the prevention of the pandemic.
- In his closing remarks, H.E. Prof. Victor Harrison, Commissioner for Economic Affairs, thanked Member States, Special Envoys and partners for their reports and activities thus far. He also congratulated all partners who have worked hard to establish the initiative of the continental platform on procurement of medical supplies. The Commissioner noted that this conference has revealed the various actions being carried out by the AUC, Member States, Department of Social Affairs and Africa CDC. These responses as well as achievements give a sense of hope amidst the crisis, but Africa has not reached the peak of the pandemic and in order not to be caught off guard, more support is needed. Lastly, he reaffirmed that the Economic Affairs Department will support all Member States in tackling the pandemic.





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