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Japan supports Zimbabwe through COVID-19 vaccine cold chain

The Government of Japan has extended its support to the COVID-19 response through its partnership with UNICEF, by improving the COVID-19 vaccines cold chain – ensuring crucial vaccines can be adequately transported and stored.

This funding aims to assist the government's capacity to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. The support from Japan includes procurement of cold chain equipment as well as strengthening health facility capacity to manage the equipment for a smoother roll out of the COVID-19 vaccines.

The grant is a continuation of Japan's support towards UNICEF's multi-sectoral response action to address the direct impact of the pandemic in Zimbabwe, the Japanese Embassy said in a statement.

The Ambassador of Japan to Zimbabwe, H.E. Mr Satoshi Tanaka, emphasised that "Providing equitable access to vaccines is key to addressing COVID-19. This grant from the people of Japan will help to ensure that the vaccines can reach each and every person in all corners of Zimbabwe as soon as possible, thus helping to contain the pandemic. In this regard, Japan is grateful to rely on the skills and expertise of UNICEF."

The programme is facilitating the training of 180 health care facility staff in all 63 districts in the management of the vaccine cold chain. In addition, eight Provincial Cold Chain Technicians will be trained in the maintenance and repair of the specialized equipment.

Furthermore, the funds will go to the development of the One Cold Chain Management Strategy and its incorporation into the broader Immunization Supply Chain Strategy. To this effect, coordination, data collection and policy formulation consultations will be held to update the 11 Provincial Cold Chain Maintenance Plans.

"UNICEF is grateful to the Government of Japan for its support in ensuring a robust cold chain is in place and immunization services are strengthened in Zimbabwe," said Dr Tajudeen Oyewale, UNICEF Representative in Zimbabwe.

"The availability and equitable distribution of vaccines is critical for putting an end to this global pandemic, and for the protection of children from childhood illnesses. The funds provided will be invaluable in helping us to continue supporting the Government with the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines while strengthening the health system," he said.

It is expected that 10 provincial centres and 50 district centres will receive new cold chain equipment. In addition, 97 health centres can look forward to new Solar Direct Drive refrigerators, 500 vaccine carriers and new cold boxes will be supplied to over 130 health centres.

Zimbabwe began its COVID-19 vaccine campaign in February, starting with prioritized categories of people such as teachers and frontline workers and is now open to everybody.

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