



# COVAX

## COVAX FACILITY ADVANCE MARKET COMMITMENT (“AMC”) ENGAGEMENT GROUP MEETING

06 December 2021

Virtual meeting

### 1. Welcome and Introduction

- 1.1 Noting that the meeting had been duly convened, the meeting commenced at 13.05 Geneva time on 06 December 2021. The meeting did not have a quorum. However, in line with the COVAX AMC Engagement Group Operating Procedures, the meeting could proceed at the option of the Co-Chairs, but no decisions could be made.
- 1.2 In his opening remarks, Minister Harjit Sajjan expressed his commitment to continue supporting the COVAX AMC Engagement Group as he took over the Co-Chair role from his predecessor, Minister Karina Gould. He noted the central role of COVAX in ensuring a more equitable response to the pandemic, which will require stronger efforts, improved transparency in communication and clear accountability on vaccine delivery. He underlined the need to shift the focus to ensuring vaccines are delivered on time to minimising wastage and ensuring that countries have the support and resources necessary to administer these vaccines.
- 1.3 Co-Chair Lia Tadesse welcomed Minister Sajjan and commended the work that has been achieved so far by the facility and by all stakeholders. She noted that the way forward is still long, and she welcomed the discussions on critical issues such as designing and allocating sufficient resource to countries to support innovative ways to address absorption and demand challenges, improving leadership ownership at all levels, and identifying local solutions to help protect communities from future outbreaks.
- 1.4 Co-Chair Retno Marsudi also extended her welcome to Co-Chair Sajjan. She noted that collective work has shown results with COVAX having

delivered more than 600 million doses to date and underscored that COVAX represents the only means to obtain COVID-19 vaccines for many countries that must meet the WHO global vaccination targets. She referred to the Omicron variant and the danger of delayed vaccine equity. She concluded by reiterating her commitment to ensure inclusiveness and transparency within the AMC Engagement Group, timely and successful delivery of vaccines, and stronger solidarity and international cooperation.

- 1.5 Seth Berkley welcomed Co-Chair Sajjan and thanked former Co-Chair Karina Gould.

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## **2. COVAX Facility updates**

- 2.1 Seth Berkley, CEO, welcomed the participants and provided some high-level updates on the COVAX Facility progress and key metrics, including on fundraising, COVID-19 vaccine candidates, and shipment and coverage. He highlighted that WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) is expected for Novavax, Covovax and Clover vaccines either by the end of 2021 or the beginning 2022.
- 2.2 Dr Berkley explained that COVAX is moving from a supply constrained to a demand constrained environment, noting the need for increasing country absorptive capacity and predictable supply. He referred to the joint COVAX-African Union (AU) statement on dose donation in response to countries' call for greater predictability, longer vaccine shelf-life and unearmarked doses.
- 2.3 In relation to supply, he indicated that COVAX is expecting to have 1.3 billion doses ready for supply in December 2021. He underlined that doses are shipped only once countries have completed preparedness steps which can take several weeks, and once doses are shipped the timelines are paced out according the national deployment plans which translate into doses administered. Dialogue between countries and COVAX focal points would be critical in this regard.
- 2.4 Marie-Ange Saraka-Yao, Managing Director, Resource Mobilisation, Private Sector Partnerships & Innovative Finance, noted that COVAX has seen an impressive mobilisation of support over 2021, with more than US\$ 10 billion raised for vaccine procurement which allowed the Facility to build a diverse portfolio of 1.7 billion doses. She highlighted that having upfront cash is essential and will be critical to mitigate the uncertainties that lay ahead. She explained that the AMC fundraising strategy will be focused on guaranteeing the certainty of supply for AMC economies, particularly for low-income countries through a financially front-loaded vaccine pool to manage the risk and allow the Facility to respond with flexibility to risks.

- 2.5 She noted that the vaccine pool will serve two purposes: i) to increase the visibility and security of supply as countries are deciding on their national plans, and ii) to manage the risks of the demand and supply side. The size of the proposed pool would be 600 million doses to respond to country needs while complementing other mechanisms that the Facility is working on. The Secretariat has launched a 100-day campaign in December 2021 to start the fund raising process, and will be leveraging the combination of sovereign and private sector funds, and use the full range of innovative financing, cost sharing as well as dose sharing mechanisms.

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### **3. Update on Omicron and guidance on additional doses**

- 3.1 Kate O'Brien, Director of the Department of Immunisation, Vaccines and Biologicals, WHO, provided an overview of the different factors which drive the transmission of the COVID-19 virus noting that the virus continues to evolve resulting in more transmissible variants. She explained that Omicron is a variant of concern, has a large number of mutations in the spike protein. She reported on the number of countries where the variant had been detected as of 5 December 2021 and highlighted that WHO is continuously monitoring the evolution of the situation. She presented data from South Africa on the transmission and severity of Omicron.
- 3.2 She presented the impact on countermeasures from the perspectives of: i) public health and social measures, ii) diagnostics, iii) therapeutics, and iv) vaccines.
- 3.3 She referred to the WHO's strong, multidisciplinary mechanism for evidence-based decision making, with the aim to monitor and assess COVID-19 variants across the virus, vaccines, and vaccine implementation.
- 3.4 She provided updates on a number of interim recommendations from the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE), namely on: i) the Bharat BBV152 Covaxin vaccine, ii) Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines, iii) Pfizer vaccine, and iv) Moderna vaccine.
- 3.5 Finally, she noted that there would be an extraordinary meeting of SAGE on 7 December 2021 to discuss the Jansen Vaccine, mixing and matching of vaccines (heterologous schedules), and a full evidence review on the issue of waning effectiveness and the role of booster doses, which would support a policy decision in early January.

#### *Discussion*

- Regarding the testing capabilities that would be required to detect the Omicron variant, the WHO representative explained that the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing detects the variant. She explained that due

to the nature of the variant, the ability to detect it depends on the absence of one of the reactions. The capacity to sequence strains in countries would be an important capacity expansion, however apart from the general desire to have a sequencing capacity, there is no specific special testing capability needed beyond PCR testing.

- In responding to a query on the vaccine platform which would be effective against the Omicron variant, the WHO representative noted that it is too early to provide reliable data at this stage on the performance of any vaccine against Omicron. It would be important to allow data to inform on the performance of vaccines against the variant, by platform and by risk group, based on results from a variety of studies and outcomes.
- In relation to the possibility for countries to acquire the WHO recommended third dose through COVAX, the Secretariat clarified that the Facility has been planning for variant-adapted vaccines and boosters scenario as part of the outlook for 2022 supply, in order to have flexible supply and options with the different manufacturers. COVAX is aligned with WHO recommendations and will look into supplying additional doses as they are needed by countries.

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#### **4. COVAX AMC one year on: Achievements and challenges**

- 4.1 Aurélia Nguyen, Managing Director, Office of the COVAX Facility, reflected on one year of the AMC Engagement Group and focused on the achievements that have enabled the delivery of vaccines to countries. She highlighted the challenges, noting that many are not unique to the Facility, and noted that the Facility is building on lessons learned from these challenges and adjusting its approach accordingly.
- 4.2 Ms Nguyen reported that COVAX has actively managed and diversified its portfolio to mitigate evolving supply and demand risks. The new portfolio strategy which was refreshed in May 2021 focused on diversifying technology platforms and sources of vaccines, and prioritising volumes for 2021 delivery.
- 4.3 She presented Q4 2021 and Q1 2022 highlights including: supply ramp up with doses being shipped from India, allocation rounds 13 and 14, 2022 procurement strategy and anticipated regulatory approval of new vaccines.
- 4.4 In relation to the COVAX Collaboration Portal (CCP), participants were informed that they can manage their allocations and documents and communicate preferences and absorption caps through this secure and centralised channel that complements the UNICEF COVAX Procurement Platform. Participants were encouraged to use this portal and provide feedback to the Secretariat.

- 4.5 Ms Nguyen concluded by reminding the participants that COVAX is here to support them with their national vaccination plans, and encouraged them to use the tools and resources available to them including utilising the CCP and maintaining communications with Gavi Senior Country Managers.

*Discussion*

- In relation to the coordination across the different COVID-19 vaccine supply channels to provide visibility to countries, it was clarified that the Facility strives to support country planning through increasing coordination with the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) so that countries are ready to receive doses. The Facility will work closely with countries to ensure that the National Deployment and Vaccination Plans (NDVPs) account for all sources of vaccine for an optimal sequencing of vaccine delivery. Furthermore, while supplies in 2021 have been sporadic, the outlook for 2022 will have increased visibility into sources, whether through Agreed Purchase Agreements (APAs) or through donated doses which would help countries plan and have better timing visibility.

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**5. Increasing vaccine uptake in AMC countries**

- 5.1 Thabani Maphosa, Managing Director, Country Programmes, referred to the shift of the volumes of vaccines that are currently going to countries. AMC countries have largely been able to absorb and roll out vaccines received from COVAX and other sources with very low rates of dose expiry. However, as supply increases in the coming months, country absorption rates will also need to increase significantly to utilise all available doses.
- 5.2 He provided an overview of country absorption, noting that it remains highly heterogenous. The Secretariat will need to focus on supporting countries that are struggling with absorption and tailor delivery support specific to those countries' contexts. Absorption bottlenecks highlighted include political will, vaccine demand, and storage capacity on specific vaccines.
- 5.3 He outlined the support provided to countries through technical guidance, catalytic financing, technical assistance, and coordination across partners. Stepping up capacity building is critical to ensure high throughput.
- 5.4 In relation to Gavi's COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Support (CDS), he explained that the Secretariat has made available two sets of funding envelopes for countries to scale up vaccination, through: i) an accelerated "full request" approval pathway, and ii) a fast-track approval mechanism for urgent needs. He encouraged countries that are at risk to access the fast-track window.

5.5 Finally, he concluded by informing the participants that the Gavi Board had emphasised during its meeting in November-December 2021 the need to step up the support to countries and to prioritise key countries that need the most support, and he invited countries to share information regarding bottlenecks and needs, and on how COVAX and partners can best support countries.

#### *Discussion*

- The representative from WHO highlighted that the recent scaling of availability of vaccines supply has meant that many countries had to scale up delivery, which underlines the need for intensification of coordination and helping unlock in-country bottlenecks. Having clarity on doses that can be used and the demand within the country would be critical to help support getting people vaccinated as quickly as possible.
- With regards to supporting countries reach the WHO global vaccination targets, the Secretariat noted that it will be informed by national targets and aspirations and will look into country gaps to support them with the different available mechanisms. At the request of the Gavi Board to enhance delivery capacity, the Gavi Alliance partners will be working together to form a senior management team to address this, and more funding would be made available to countries. A temporary Steering Committee of the Board will be established to provide a strategic direction on country delivery.
- With respect to ensuring coherence between COVAX and the ACT Accelerator (ACT-A) partnership, the Secretariat referred to the ongoing progress as follows:
  - From funding perspective: a funders forum has been established to bring all bilateral and multilateral funders together to give stronger visibility on countries' needs and remaining gaps. The AU was brought on Board to help support countries in a coordinated manner. The Secretariat continues to work with the World Bank to mobilise their significant delivery funding to ensure that it is complementary to country needs.
  - From technical assistance perspective: the Country Readiness and Delivery (CRD) workstream focuses on identifying implementation challenges and to provide solutions to countries.

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## **6. Co-Chair consultation on AMC Engagement Group meetings in 2022**

6.1 Co-Chair Harjit Sajjan referred to the survey which was circulated to AMC participants seeking their feedback on the use of AMC meetings in 2022 and reminded the participants that the deadline for providing feedback was

extended until 15 December 2021. He encouraged participants to provide their feedback which will inform the Co-Chairs planning for 2022.

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**7. Summary Key take-aways and closing remarks**

- 7.1 Aurélia Nguyen presented the meeting summary and key takeaways.
- 7.2 She noted that the date of the next AMC Group meeting will be shared with the group at a later stage pending the results of the survey.
- 7.3 In his concluding remarks, Dr Berkley emphasised that the purpose of the AMC Group meetings is to hear from the countries. He encouraged the participants to reach out to Gavi Senior Country Managers and COVAX focal points, as well as to WHO and UNICEF who are ready to respond to questions and provide support.
- 7.4 Co-Chair Harjit Sajjan thanked the participants for their valuable contributions.
- 7.5 After determining that there was no further business, the meeting was brought to a close.

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