

09 February 2021

To: Professor Glenda Gray  
President and CEO Medical Research Council

From: Professor Ames Dhai  
Chair Bioethics Advisory Panel (Medical Research  
Council)

## **ADVISORY: FRAMEWORK FOR FAIR, EQUITABLE AND TIMELY ALLOCATION OF COVID-19 VACCINES IN AFRICA**

**PROBLEM STATEMENT:** As of early February 2021, Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-2019) has killed more than 2.3 million people globally and infected more than 106 million. In Africa there have been almost 100 000 deaths and close to 3.5 million infections. South Africa has close to 1.5 million infections and has had 47 000 deaths. Critical pillars of society, including provision of health care, education and social functioning, have been severely harmed and the economy has been devastated globally, regionally and locally. With careful management, a COVID-19 vaccine management strategy is key to reduce severe disease, trigger prompt economic recovery, and restore social functioning. Successful immunisation of a critical mass of the African population requires an accessible and effective COVID-19 vaccine. Given the scarcity of resources, including the vaccine itself, it is necessary to weigh options and make prioritisation decisions with both technical and ethical elements.

**RATIONALE:** The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), a Statutory Council established to respond to the needs of the population in South Africa, takes the lead in conducting research that is contextually relevant. While there are multiple initiatives that attempt to define guidelines for fair allocation for COVID-19 vaccines, these are mainly from a western paradigm with little consideration of African indigenous values and voices. A collaboration between the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (A CDC) and SAMRC, led to the convening of a regional consultation with input from over 1300 policymakers, community advocates, ethicists, and public health experts on December 14 and 15, 2020. The objective was to contextualise the discussion on fair allocation of COVID-19 vaccines to the African context. A framework for fair allocation of COVID-19 vaccines in Africa based on African indigenous values was proposed and developed.

The four proposed pillars of the Framework are:

- **Affirming the humanity of others:** Allocation decisions must be for societal benefit and promote common good while being nondiscriminatory and respecting human dignity.
- **Survival of the community:** Allocation decisions must be based on the best available evidence; essential service workers and those that contribute towards the prevention and treatment of diseases and those at greatest risk of severe illness and death should be prioritised for vaccine allocation.
- **Social Solidarity:** Allocation decisions must take into consideration the bonds unifying communities, their interdependence, attachment to or interest in others and the significant social, economic and personal disruptions and hardships experienced.
- **Meaningful community engagement:** Allocation decisions must be trusted. Active community engagement allows for authenticity, and promotes accountability and ownership of the decisions made about allocation thereby engendering trust.



These four pillars are to be applied to the following six proposed strategic allocation decisions:

- **Vaccine selection criteria:** Which criteria should guide the selection of vaccines for the African continent, and what should the concrete targets be?
- **Financing and procurement of vaccines:** How should financing and procurement be organised to maximise value for the Member States along several dimensions, including safety, efficacy, affordability and access, but also the safeguarding of sovereignty over critical public health decisions?
- **Vaccine delivery:** How should vaccine access and delivery be organised, including the selection and sequencing of target groups, streamlining of regulatory processes, and setup of critical vaccine supply and access logistics?
- **Community engagement:** When and how should critical community stakeholders be engaged, including community leaders and representatives of community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, key opinion leaders and civil society - to ensure acceptability and uptake of the vaccines?
- **Communications:** What are the balanced strategic communication strategies to address relevant audiences and minimise vaccine hesitancy and vaccine over-confidence that may lead to laxity in Covid 19 preventative and health seeking behaviour?
- **Research and evidence gathering:** What other data and evidence should be generated to strengthen the decision making process for scale up of COVID-19 vaccine access in Africa?

In effect, the Framework, based on African indigenous values and Ubuntu philosophy informs efforts to save as many persons and the most life-years as possible, prioritising populations whose services are critical to the survival of others, and facilitating processes that ensure vaccine access to those eligible follows an agreed allocation process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

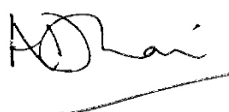
The Bioethics Advisory Panel of the SA MRC recommends to the President and CEO of the SAMRC to:

- Adopt the Framework for the Fair, Equitable and Timely Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccines in Africa, developed by the A CDC and SAMRC, as a guideline document for use and domestication in South Africa.
- Recommend the adoption of the Framework by the National Minister of Health for adaptation and use in South Africa.

The Framework is attached as an annexure to this Advisory.

Thank you for considering the recommendations in this Advisory.

Sincerely



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Professor A Dhai  
Chairperson Bioethics Advisory Panel