

Across borders: the UK's multilateral response to a global health crisis

2020 has set unprecedented challenges for countries across the globe. But more importantly, it has emphasised the importance of global partnerships to tackle this pandemic. Against the challenges of COVID-19, the UK has pooled its existing assets, expertise and resources to contribute to a massive, collective effort against this pandemic. More importantly, we have championed a multilateral approach to develop vaccines and treatments while promoting transparent development and equitable access. This 'vaccine multilateralism' means we will need to reach across borders and recognise that a global pandemic calls for global cooperation.

Contributing to the global effort against COVID-19

The UK has actively engaged with an unparalleled alliance of countries to accelerate vaccine development through the UN-led COVAX facility, where we have committed £571 million to support equitable access to a vaccine, especially for developing countries. We are pleased to note that the Philippines has partnered with COVAX as a beneficiary of the Advanced Market Commitment. Great progress has been made by clinical trials being undertaken by the University of Oxford and Imperial College London, supported by £130m of UK government funding. These scientific and academic innovators are complemented by British firms providing significant private sector contributions.

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has several scientific collaborations globally, providing innovative vaccine adjuvant technology.

AstraZeneca has partnered with the University of Oxford, and while they await phase 3 trials within the year, their initial data showed encouraging results. They have committed to broadly and equitably supplying their vaccine candidate at no profit to make it more affordable. And the anticipated storage temperatures of 2 to 8 degrees Celsius are similar to those you would see in domestic refrigerators.

In ASEAN, £6.3million of additional UK funding has been announced to tackle the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 across Southeast Asia. Cooperation with the Asian Development Bank and ASEAN bodies will support economic recovery, health education and training, and the development of a regional pandemic alert system to communicate real-time COVID-19 risks in the region.

UK-Philippines enhanced partnership as a force for good

Ahead of marking 75 years of diplomatic engagement next year, bilateral cooperation between the UK and the Philippines remains a force for good.

COVID-19 shaped the discussion of the second UK-Philippines Economic Dialogue in August, where both countries set an ambitious agenda towards an inclusive, green and sustainable economic recovery. Since then, we have mobilised our partnerships to contribute to local pandemic response.

The British Embassy is working with the UP College of Public Health to pool technical expertise from the UK and the Philippines for a COVID-19 learning series supporting public health workers and local governments, including the Doctors to the Barrios Programme. Strategic learning exchanges supported by the Prosperity Fund Better Health Programme (BHP) have enabled Pasig City, Iloilo City, the University of the Philippines and the Department of Health to engage with public health bodies in the UK part of BHP's Strategic Partner network including the NHS, Public Health England and NICE International. Re-adapted elements of the Prosperity Fund and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund will continue to contribute to local health responses, including in the Bangsamoro region.

Looking ahead: the case for a multilateral response

Our work to respond to COVID-19, including our on-going discussions with the Philippines on vaccines, remains an important priority – which Nigel Adams, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister for Asia, will take forward in his visit to Manila later this week.

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to test our resolve for international cooperation to save lives and build back better. But there is hope – unparalleled breakthroughs in vaccine research and development at a record pace have been made possible because of global cooperation and strengthens the case for such a collective, multilateral approach to combat this pandemic.

As Ambassador, I consider it my personal duty to do all I can to ensure fair and equitable access to a safe and effective vaccine, that has been developed transparently.

This is not a race which pits country against country, or company against company. We are all racing against the virus. And only by working together can we bring an end to the pandemic for everyone, everywhere.