

UK aid-backed drone technology supports Ghana's coronavirus fight

A partnership between UK aid and Gavi: the Vaccine Alliance, is supporting the Government of Ghana to use Zipline drones to collect coronavirus test samples from across the country.

This world-leading technology has increased Ghana's ability to deliver vaccines for diseases like yellow fever and polio and collect testing kits for coronavirus, particularly in rural areas where access by road is difficult.

Together, the UK government and Gavi alongside the Gates Foundation and delivery company UPS Foundation have funded Zipline's drone stations.

Often in hard-to-reach areas, these stations allow health experts to safely collect test samples and deliver these to one of Ghana's testing laboratories. The stations are also used to load the drones with medical supplies to make sure they reach those most in need, as well as health workers supporting communities in rural areas in small community health centres.

Iain Walker, British High Commissioner to Ghana said:

"It is only through global collaboration that we will overcome this global pandemic. The partnership between UK aid and Gavi is an example of this collaboration in action.

"By supporting Gavi, UK aid in Ghana is helping to save lives by tracking coronavirus, getting medical equipment to those most in need and ensuring that children across the country have access to vaccines for the diseases that still needlessly devastate communities.

"I am proud that the UK government's recent pledge of the equivalent of £330million a year for the next 5 years will support Gavi's lifesaving work across the world, protecting lives and allowing developing countries to focus more resources on tackling coronavirus."

Accessibility to transport and poor roads means that it takes days for samples to arrive from rural areas at Ghana's test centres. This also leaves those transporting the tests open to transmission of coronavirus.

With UK aid support through Gavi, Zipline's drones are transporting test samples in a matter of hours meaning that cases are identified and treated quickly, lessening the spread of infection. Already coronavirus test samples collected from more than 1,000 health centres in rural areas across Ghana have been taken to laboratories in Accra and Kumasi.

As well as returning coronavirus tests and medical equipment, Zipline's drones are also transporting immunisation kits protecting children from

deadly disease such as diphtheria and measles which still impact communities across Ghana every year.

Cyril Nogier, Gavi Senior Country Manager for Ghana said:

“The government of Ghana has shown incredible commitment to immunisation for many years, working hard to ensure no child goes without protection against deadly, preventable diseases.

“Right now Ghana leads the world in its use of drone technology, which has already helped thousands of children in remote areas get access to vaccines. I’m delighted that this technology, with vital support from the UK and other partners, is now playing a role in the country’s fight against coronavirus.”

On 4 June, the UK government will host Global Vaccine Summit – this will support Gavi to gather much needed funding to deliver vaccines against diseases such as measles, polio and cholera around the world and to ensure global access to all new coronavirus vaccines.

Globally the UK government has already pledged up to £764 million (\$935.6 million) to combat the outbreak of coronavirus, and in April the UK pledged equivalent to £330 million a year over the next five years to Gavi. This vital funding ensures that through Gavi, UK aid will continue to support innovation such as the drone technology used in Ghana, saving lives around the world. In Africa, the UK has pledge to invest up to £20 million in the African Union’s new ‘African Union Covid19 Response Fund’ to tackle coronavirus and save lives.