



transaid

PRESS RELEASE

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TRANSAID TO SUPPORT NEW COVID-19 PROJECT FOR HGV DRIVERS IN UGANDA

Transaid has commenced a major project to provide access to fast, quality COVID-19 screening for truck drivers at border crossings in Uganda. The initiative aims to help reduce the spread and impact of COVID-19 and lessen the economic burden on transport companies by offering rapid antigen testing for drivers – a move which it is hoped will help shape policies for the use of such tests in the future.

The international development organisation was invited to partner with FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics, which seeks to ensure equitable access to reliable diagnosis around the world, as well as the Uganda National Health Laboratory Services (UNHLS), to deliver this essential work.

Together, the three organisations are setting out to assess the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using rapid antigen tests to enable truck drivers to move safely across borders without the delays and costs experienced with more expensive and slower PCR tests, with a plan to advocate for national policy change if the validation studies prove successful.

Transaid will also be using its expertise from two existing COVID-19 projects supporting truck drivers in Uganda and Zambia, to further raise awareness of symptoms and prevention and to integrate road safety messages. It will also provide drivers, transport managers and transport associations with information to help support vaccine take-up in Uganda and the wider region.

Caroline Barber, Chief Executive of Transaid, says: “Right now, cross-border HGV drivers cannot equitably or affordably access fast and reliable testing, and this can lead to the rapid spread of COVID-19 amongst drivers and the communities they interact with. We are

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confident that making quality testing more widely available for drivers sets the foundation for adequate prevention, detection and response.”

Currently many borders require proof of a negative test result within the last 72 hours before allowing entry. This has led to long queues with drivers waiting several days for PCR test results, whilst a lack of access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), limited sensitisation and a high degree of interaction between drivers, communities and front-line workers at borders is increasing the risk of infection.

Dr. Emma Hannay, Chief Access Officer at FIND, says: “Testing is crucial to stopping the spread of COVID-19, but testing strategies must be fit-for-purpose. Rapid antigen screening is quicker, cheaper and more convenient than PCR testing, potentially providing a practical solution for truck drivers at border crossings. These rapid tests could help alleviate the congestion we are now seeing at borders, and also curb the growing trade in fake negative test certificates, which is becoming a major public health concern.”

Dr. Susan Nabadda, Commissioner, National Laboratory and Diagnostic Services at UNHLS, says: “This project has come at exactly the right moment in the fight against COVID-19. We hope the findings can be used to influence policy by enabling rapid testing among asymptomatic truck drivers and fast track movement of trucks and goods across the border while protecting the population of Uganda and neighbouring countries.”

Ugandan transport companies have reported that the current slow pace of PCR testing at borders means a truck on international long-haul work is spending an additional 36 days idle per year.

Turnaround times have equally been impacted, with reports of drivers taking twice as long to complete the 1,150km journey between Kampala and Mombasa, reducing earning potential and leading to increased concerns from unions about the mental health of drivers. Some drivers have also reported security concerns at border posts and increased risk of theft to their cargo.

This new project is currently expected to run until December 2022 and will initially focus on the border crossings in Malaba and Busia – major ports of entry between Uganda and Kenya.

For more information and to find out how you can support the organisation visit www.transaid.org.

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Note to Editor:

About Transaid

Transaid transforms lives through safe, available, and sustainable transport. Founded by Save the Children, The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), and its Patron, HRH The Princess Royal, the international development organisation works with communities, partners, and governments to solve transport challenges throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

Transaid works in two core areas, road safety and access to health, to solve two of the biggest transport challenges in sub-Saharan Africa. Transaid's road safety work focuses on influencing safe driver behaviour with long term programmes in Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, responding to local needs for improved training for drivers and riders of trucks, buses, motorcycles and forklift trucks. On the access to health side, Transaid is working with local partners and communities to strengthen access to health services, primarily in rural areas. They are also working to strengthen health supply chains in collaboration with local partners and governments.

Transaid enjoys strong backing from the transport and logistics industry and the active involvement of its patron, HRH The Princess Royal.



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