



National and international efforts sought to overcome this supply crisis, with mixed success. Countries which were able to establish purchasing partnerships nationally and with neighbours fared best. In conjunction with the African Union and Africa CDC, a partnership platform to increase purchasing power was established to achieve greater leverage in the supplies market in a bid to avoid being frozen out by richer countries.<sup>(c)</sup> At international level, the United Nations and WHO launched the United Nations COVID-19 Supply Chain System, which eventually channelled half of the essential supplies reaching low- and middle-income countries. Local research, development and manufacturing were used to bolster supplies, ranging from personal protective equipment (PPE) to test kits and developmental work on vaccines.

An early and continuing **critical gap is in oxygen supplies**, vital in a respiratory pandemic, and there is no clear lead agency devoted to its delivery. This is not a new problem – up to half of all health facilities in resource-limited settings have persistently been found to lack reliable oxygen supplies<sup>(41, 42)</sup>.

The shortage of essential supplies had a major impact on health workers in the early stages of the response, contributing to the high death toll. Health workers have reported that their fears

---

c Africa Medical Supplies Platform (<https://amsp.africa>): “We help institutional healthcare providers source critical equipment, fast”.