WHO: Efforts to expand access to medicines in Africa must be intensified

Brazzaville, 18 September 2017 – A five year project to increase access to medicines in 15 African countries ends this month with some important achievements but also many challenges ahead.

“Africa carries 25% of the world’s disease burden, but consumes less than 1% of global health expenditure,” said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa. “Largely this is because of insufficient access to quality medicines. Without greater and more concerted efforts in this area, we will not achieve universal health coverage.”

The EC/ACP/WHO Renewed Partnership project began in 2012 with EUR 10 million funding from the European Commission to build stronger pharmaceutical systems in 15 African countries*. It brought about many improvements, such as greater availability of child-friendly medicines, particularly for HIV, TB and malaria, faster time to registration for some vital medicines, and some progress towards universal health coverage (i.e. coverage of health expenses for the whole community).

However, much work remains unfinished due to issues of governance, lack of infrastructure and low resources and capacity.

“We don’t have the correct figures, but we know that approximately one third of Africans do not access the medicines they need,” said Dr Suzanne Hill, WHO Director for Essential medicines and health products. “Many medicines are missing from pharmacy shelves, especially in rural areas; there are problems of substandard and falsified medicines entering distribution chains; and many households go without other necessities in order to pay for medicines.”

With the project coming to an end, the partners will meet in Zanzibar on 19-21 September to take stock of achievements and devise a way forward.

“We need our countries to set up stronger health systems and ensure that all communities are accessing the medicines they need, when they need them, at an affordable price,” added Dr Moeti. “Basically, we need African governments to take access to medicines seriously and invest time and resources into the issue, and we need technical and financial support.”

* Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

Note to editors:

The Renewed Partnership is an alliance between the Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), the European Commission (EC), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Its main goal was to contribute to the improvement of public health and achieving universal health coverage in the 15 African countries. The project focused on strengthening pharmaceutical systems, with five main objectives:

- Improved availability and supply of essential medicines in national, regional and community health facilities;
• Lower medicines prices and improved mechanisms for financing and for coverage of essential medicines in social protection schemes;
• Improved quality and safety of medicines and reduced occurrence of substandard medicines and of medicines that pose health risks;
• Improved medicines selection, prescribing, dispensing and use;
• Improved access to reliable information on countries’ pharmaceutical policies and practices and enhanced transparency and good governance of the pharmaceutical system.