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**CONTINENTAL EXPERTS MEETING
CAPE TOWN
SOUTH AFRICA
1-5 August 2016**

**EPIDEMIOLOGICAL NETWORK PLANNING MEETING AND CONTINENTAL
CONSULTATION FOR DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION FOCAL POINTS**

CONCEPT NOTE

1. BACKGROUND

1. Under its project “Strengthening Research and Data Collection Capacity for Drug Use Prevention and Treatment in Africa”, the African Union Commission seeks to increase evidence based services for drug use problems to improve policy formulation and service delivery in African Union Member States.
2. The project, implemented with financial support of the US Government, through the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), will facilitate the establishment of national and regional epidemiological networks on drug use in five (5) AU Member States in 2016, and in another five (5) Member States in year 2 (2017). This will be achieved through training and capacity building initiatives in the ten (10) Member States. It will also facilitate consultation and information exchange among drug demand reduction technical focal points on an annual basis.
3. It is to be noted that Africa has not only become a major transit route in the global trade in narcotics, but also a major consuming region, presenting major challenges not only to health care systems, but also to the overall social, economic and security milieu. Drug use constitutes a significant health risk, yet there is an enormous unmet need for drug use prevention and treatment, care and support of drug users. In many African countries, national health-care systems lack financial resources to meet treatment demand adequately, particularly as regards facilities for treatment and rehabilitation of drug-dependent persons. Indeed, the availability of evidence- based treatment facilities in Africa is substantially below the world average. While approximately one (1) in six (6) problem drug users globally receives treatment for drug abuse disorders or dependence each year, in Africa, only one (1) in eighteen (18) receives the same, and predominantly for treatment related to cannabis abuse.
4. Compounding the mentioned lack of treatment facilities, is the fact that the real magnitude of drug use is largely unknown due to insufficient and even unreliable information. It is for this reason that the Sixth Session of the African Union Conference of Ministers in charge of Drug Control (CAMDC6), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6-10 October 2014, recognized that lack of baseline data and information on drug use hinders programme development and reporting. The meeting strongly recommended the development of regional and national surveillance networks, and in particular, to consider supporting countries involved in the nascent West African Epidemiological Network on Drug Use (WENDU) and other regional and national initiatives in the rest of the Continent.
5. It is against this background that AUC in partnership with INL are organizing a continental technical experts’ consultation on establishment of national epidemiological networks. The Consultation is envisaged to draw from experience from the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU), which has been functional since 1996, and from WENDU, as well as from existing information from focus countries. Synergies will be sought with international organizations implementing or intending to implement similar initiatives in Africa such

as the United Nations Office on Drug Control (UNODC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Institute for Security (ISS), both regarding standardized tools, as well regarding increasing the coverage to more countries not targeted by this project.

2. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

6. The main objective of the meeting is to plan for the establishment of national epidemiology networks in the first five countries, and specifically, to:
 - i. Gather baseline information by assessing existing data systems, data requirements, data sources, current practices and gaps with a view to design standard data collection tools;
 - ii. Select participating countries;
 - iii. Identify training needs; and
 - iv. Hold a focal points' technical consultation on drug demand reduction to share experiences and review implementation progress, including emerging challenges towards improving access to comprehensive, evidence-informed, ethical and human rights based drug use prevention, dependence, treatment and aftercare services in Member States. The consultation is expected to prepare groundwork for final reporting on the implementation of the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017) at the Second African Union Specialized Technical Committee Meeting on Health, Population and Drug Control (STC-HPDC) scheduled for March 2017.

3. DRAFT AGENDA

7. The agenda will be organised into two main parts. Part 1, running for two days, will mainly focus on gathering baseline information and planning for establishment of the network. [FiveFour](#) selected countries with more developed data and research systems on drug epidemiology will meet to share experience and practices, and develop consensus on the type of data to be collected, including data sources.
8. Part 2, running for two and a half days, will focus on demand reduction consultation and consensus building to identify the first five priority countries, as well as to review implementation progress towards improving access to comprehensive, evidence-informed, ethical and human rights based drug use prevention, dependence, and treatment and aftercare services. Countries will be accorded opportunity to share their experiences.

4. PARTICIPATION

9. Participation will be limited to Members States and Regional Economic Communities. Two (2) technical experts will be invited from each Member State, representing specifically those Ministries and government agencies responsible for drug use prevention, treatment and care, one (1) who must be a drug demand reduction focal point and the second representative being responsible for national drug demand

reduction data collection and reporting. Only five (5) countries will participate in the first two (2) days. Technical experts from the Regional Economic Communities will also be invited. International Organisations, namely UNODC, WHO, and ISS will be invited for experience sharing and to provide technical inputs as needed. The South African Medical Research Council (MRC), based in Cape Town, which is the custodian of the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU), and which also facilitated the SADC Epidemiological Network on Drug Use (SENDU) and well as the West African network (WENDU), will take a prominent role in the training of Member States and RECs at the meeting.

5. DOCUMENTS

10. The following documents will provide background material at the Consultation, and will be made available at the Meeting:

- AU Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017);
- Report of the First African Union Specialized Technical Committee Meeting on Health, Population and Drug Control (STC-HPDC-1);
- Report of the the Sixth Session of the African Union Conference of Ministers in charge of Drug Control (CAMDC6);
- Continental Minimum Quality Standards for Drug Use Treatment, 2012;
- Common African Position (CAP) for the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, 19-21 April 2016.
- Progress Report on the Implementation of the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017), April 2015.

6. ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS

11. The African Union Commission will be responsible for organisational support (including logistical matters such as air tickets and per diem) and technical preparations, in addition to drafting of the Agenda, Work Programme and other documents.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

12. Participants will be required to prepare brief activity progress towards implementation of to comprehensive, evidence-informed, ethical and human rights based drug use prevention, dependence treatment , and data and information collection systems in line with the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control;

13. Contact person for any further information on the Consultation: Dr Olawale Maiyegun, Director of Social Affairs, Department of Social Affairs, African Union Commission, Addis Ababa, Tel: +251- 11-518-2217; Fax:+251-115517844, email: OngoloJM@africa-union.org; StrijdomJ@africa-union.org; TigistZ@africa-union.org