



**Célébration de la
Journée de l'OOAS
Celebration of WAHO Day
Celebração do Dia da OOAS**

9 Juillet / July / Julho



**Message on the occasion of the
35th WAHO Day
by Professor Stanley OKOLO,
Director General of WAHO**

9 July 2022

Today 9 July 2022, the West Africa Health Organization (WAHO) commemorates 35 years of its existence. As the specialized health institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), WAHO works daily to promote better health for ECOWAS citizens through regional integration. Without a doubt, the last few years have been particularly challenging as the region continues to deal with the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic in addition to endemic and re-emerging infectious diseases, maternal and under 5 deaths, and other health issues affecting the population.

The theme chosen for this year's WAHO Day is: "*Boosting local production and availability of quality, safe and efficacious drugs and vaccines in the region.*" Because of its devastating health, social and economic impact, the COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus the diminished capacity of West Africa and indeed the African continent to provide quality vaccines for the population. It is clear that sustainable production of drugs and vaccines on African territory is necessary to guarantee health security and reduce dependency on imported pharmaceuticals.

Africans make-up approximately 16 percent of the world's population, but has about 25 percent of the global burden of disease. In addition, although over 50 percent of the global infectious disease burden is borne by Africans, less than 1 percent of the vaccines available to combat some of these infectious diseases are produced in Africa. Boosting regional manufacturing capabilities of drugs and vaccines will not only strengthen Member States' pandemic preparedness and response to future outbreaks, it will also drive investment in research and development, boost industrial output, and improve regional economy.

Over the past few months, WAHO has championed several activities to drive this initiative in collaboration with partners, governments and stakeholders. At a high-level meeting on 10 – 11 May 2022 in Accra Ghana, WAHO and the ECOWAS department of Industry and Private Sector Development, in collaboration with Africa CDC brought together stakeholders on "Vaccines Manufacturing in the West Africa Region" to agree a roadmap for boosting local production of vaccines and create a framework for collaboration, and information exchange. This high-level event identified bottlenecks in vaccines research, development and

production, and the specific type of vaccine each manufacturer in the region could produce within a timeframe. The Roadmap outlines the specific types of vaccines that will be produced in the region in the short-term, (2022-2024), medium term, (2025 – 2027), and long-term, (2028 – 2030).

On the occasion of WAHO’s 35th Anniversary, it is important to stress that tackling the issue of vaccine hesitancy is as critical to the protection of the West Africa population, as is local production of drugs and vaccines. WAHO therefore, continues to provide technical and financial support to Member States to accelerate immunization campaigns, and improve risk communication and community engagement activities at grassroots level.

WAHO remains focused on its mandate by championing several health improvement programs and projects including those aimed at reducing the number of women dying during childbirth and the number of children dying before the age of 5, reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, and achieving malaria elimination in several Member States.

We look forward to a brighter future, working together in solidarity with all 15 Member States of ECOWAS, the Ministers of Health, the technical and financial partners, and the general population. We remain extremely grateful to the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government for the unflinching support to WAHO over the years.

As we celebrate WAHO Day today the 9th of July 2022, we take this opportunity to wish our Muslim Brothers and Sisters Eid Mubarak!

Long live WAHO! Long live ECOWAS! Long live regional integration!

Footnote

The West Africa Health Organization (WAHO) was established in 1987 but became fully operational in 2000 when the first Director General was appointed. Over the years, WAHO has evolved to become a regional leader in health as it continues to deliver on its mandate as the Health Institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).