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Benin Destroys 118 Tons of Counterfeit Pharmaceuticals and Develops In-Country Capacity in Pharmaceutical Waste Management

More than 100,000 deaths a year in Africa are linked to counterfeit medicines. Benin, due to its coastal location, is one of the most active “consumers” of counterfeit pharmaceuticals. In 2016, in an effort to improve and protect public health, Benin participated in a joint seizure operation of the World Customs Organization’s Action against Counterfeit and Illicit Medicines. The authorities seized approximately 118 tons of counterfeit pharmaceuticals. This success added an extra burden to Benin’s struggle with safe pharmaceutical waste management. With only 2.5 percent of GDP allocated to public health in 2013, proper handling, collection, and disposal of counterfeit pharmaceutical waste competes with the myriad other public health priorities.

In 2017, by request of the Beninese government, USAID’s Global Health Supply Chain - Technical Assistance (GHSC-TA) Francophone Task Order conducted a rapid assessment study which evaluated the storage conditions of the seized commodities and the capacity of the available local service providers to dispose of pharmaceutical waste. The project developed an action plan to manage and dispose of accumulated counterfeit pharmaceutical products, selected a local service provider and trained forty staff as well as two staff of the Beninese Ministry of Health in safe pharmaceutical waste management. In December 2017, the local service provider, under GHSC-TA supervision, successfully destroyed 118 tons of counterfeit pharmaceuticals by inertization.

This is the first counterfeit pharmaceutical waste management operation conducted in Benin with the support of USAID. It demonstrates a shift in how Benin, along with other developing countries, is exploring expanded options in addition to the standard exportation of waste. With the help of GHSC-TA Francophone Task Order, Benin now has a local service provider trained and equipped to conduct safe, environmentally compliant pharmaceutical waste management. In addition, the project assisted the Ministry of Health of Benin to revise guidelines for waste management organization for future endeavors. This is one steady step towards a sustainable health supply chain system in West Africa.

Photo: Employees of a local service provider trained by GHSC-TA Francophone TO in safe pharmaceutical waste management are neutralizing counterfeit pharmaceuticals prior to the final disposal at an approved landfill site.