

UNAIDS and Millennium Villages Project taking steps to eliminate mother-to-child HIV transmission in Africa

With scale-up of programme to national level, 16,000 child HIV infections could be averted

Nairobi, 11 January 2010 – Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS, and Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute and Special Advisor to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, visited one of the Millennium Villages in Sauri (western Kenya) to witness first-hand the progress that has been made in fighting poverty, boosting agricultural productivity, increasing access to health care and education, and creating an enabling environment for communities to build and sustain economic growth. Their visit focused particularly on efforts to virtually eliminate mother-to-child HIV transmission and was part of an official five-day visit to Kenya.

UNAIDS and the Millennium Villages Project joined forces in September 2009 to strengthen prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission (PMTCT) services at the village level with the aim of creating "MTCT-free zones". In the Millennium Villages, PMTCT services are integrated within the maternal-child health package and a continuum of care is offered to the mother from the antenatal period through delivery and the postnatal period. Levels of HIV testing among pregnant women in the Millennium Village sites have increased from 10% at baseline to over 60% in three years. The UNAIDS-MVP partnership will further improve on these gains by decreasing the incidence of HIV among women, meeting needs for modern contraceptives and blocking transmission from mothers to their babies.

"UNAIDS brings unrivaled global expertise, leadership, and detailed strategies to the fight against HIV/AIDS, including PMTCT," said Sachs. "The MVP brings the power of integrated rural development, including primary health systems, to the fight against poverty, hunger, and disease. By teaming up, UNAIDS and MVP will design and implement a powerful system to bring PMTCT to near zero, and do so in a way that can be utilized in other parts of Africa and the world. I am profoundly grateful to Michel Sidibé and his colleagues at UNAIDS for this unique partnership, and know how much my colleagues throughout the MVP are looking forward to learning from and working together with UNAIDS."

In 2008, 390,000 infants in sub-Saharan Africa became infected with HIV from their mothers. "AIDS has become the leading cause of the death among infants and young children in much of sub-Saharan Africa," said Michel Sidibé. "We have seen that it is possible to virtually eliminate infant HIV infections in high-income countries through HIV testing of pregnant women, contraception, and the use of antiretroviral drugs during and after delivery. Now we must apply the knowledge and tools to create an AIDS-free generation in Africa and the rest of the world. The move towards universal prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission requires translating scientific evidence into routine practice. With a concerted effort, we can fully curb the mother-to-child transmission of HIV and bear witness as an HIV-free generation is born in Africa and the world," said Sidibé.

The Millennium Villages Project (MVP), a partnership between the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), The Earth Institute at Columbia University, Millennium Promise, and local governments, provides a new approach to fighting poverty. Now covering approximately 500,000 people and growing, the project is showing the development community worldwide that an integrated package of development interventions, supported

by a modest financial investment-about \$110 per person annually over five to ten years-will be instrumental to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Improving child survival and reducing mother-to-child transmission of HIV remains a key focus of this effort.

As a result of the MVP, there are now six health centers in Sauri, where between 60-70% of people live on less than US\$1 per day. Health throughout the Sauri village cluster has improved greatly since the project was set up in 2005 with a reduction in malaria cases, significant improvements in maternal and child health, and increased access to HIV testing and treatment.

The partnership between UNAIDS and MVP focuses specifically on achieving Millennium Development Goal 4 (reduce child mortality), Goal 5 (improve maternal health), and Goal 6 (combat HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases) by 2015 by decreasing the incidence of HIV among women, meeting couple's needs for modern contraceptives and blocking transmission from mothers to their babies.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland-with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. The Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Contributing to achieving global commitments to universal access to comprehensive interventions for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is the number one priority for UNAIDS. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org

For more information on the **Millennium Villages Project** (MVP), visit www.millenniumvillages.org.