“Game changing” consultation meeting looks into ways to scale up nursing labour and education markets in Africa

Geneva, Switzerland; Nairobi, Kenya; 15 March 2018 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN), the World Bank, Jhpiego and the East, Central and Southern Africa College of Nursing (ECSACON) have convened a consultation meeting with 15 Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (ECSA) countries in Nairobi, Kenya to discuss and plan the labour market and education system analysis of nursing and midwifery.

ICN, the world’s first and widest reaching international organisation for health professionals, has partnered with the World Bank to access nursing labour and education markets in the ECSA region.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss the proposed analytical work aiming to assess nursing labour and education markets in the ECSA countries; to engage with nurse leaders representing government, regulatory bodies and associations from ECSA nations to build
consensus and an action plan for investing in nursing education in the ECSA countries; and to identify synergies with other regional initiatives and develop partnerships to implement and disseminate the results from the analytical work and an action plan for investments.

Participants from the 15 countries, including Government Chief Nursing Officers, regulators and national nursing associations commented that the data that will be generated from this work is essential to be able to mobilize regional policies. They concluded that this is “a game changing effort”.

Dr Judith Shamian, ICN President Emerita, who represented ICN at the meeting, said, “ICN supports the scaling up of nursing education in Africa in order to address the shortages that these countries are currently facing. Nurses are key to tackling the health challenges in Africa as often the nurse is the only health professional people will see.”

Thembeka Gwagwa, ICN’s second Vice President, added, “Nurses, as leaders in delivering health care, have ventured into an innovative approach to mobilise political will and build effective governance for nursing development. This new radical nursing model approach is needed to meet the ever changing environment, health needs and burden of diseases.”

ICN believes an active and committed health workforce is a necessary prerequisite to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Nurses are working to develop new strategies to attain UHC, the SDGs, and the Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030.

However, current challenges such as weak health systems, made worse by migration and the shortage of health professionals, emerging health threats such as pandemics, natural disasters, war and conflict and the current economic crisis all complicate progress.

The consultation meeting addressed key considerations such as:

- More than 80 percent of the population in low-income countries cannot access health services because of the lack of sufficiently trained health workers.¹

- The nursing and midwifery workforce, with its potential to address most health complications in low-income countries, needs to be expanded and contracted for more flexible functions to improve health systems coverage, responsiveness and efficiency.

- Much of the expansion in private sector training is currently taking place without sufficient attention to shaping the market based on real needs and the best value for money for patients and governments.

- A solid evidence base related to the education and labour markets for nurses and midwives is a critical pre-condition for the development of an investment case for intervention.

¹ ILO, 2016.
The preliminary findings will be presented at the ECSACON Conference in September 2018 in Kenya.

**Note for Editors**
The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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