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Tackling the QAACT market in Kinshasa, DRC through routine surveys

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BACKGROUND

The private sector in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), sells 86% of the city's antimalarials, but offers inefficient monotherapies, artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs) of questionable quality and only few, expensive quality-assured ACTs (QAACTs).

To improve access to affordable QAACTs, in 2016 Population Services International (PSI) and Association de Santé Familiale (ASF) began facilitating the introduction of subsidized QAACTs bearing a 'Green Leaf' logo, distributed through existing supply chains. Supported by provider and consumer behaviour change activities, these lower-cost QAACTs were expected to increase access to quality medicine and crowd out less effective treatments.

METHODS

To effectively respond to market trends and address challenges in a timely manner, PSI and ASF implemented quarterly mystery shopper (MS) surveys.

Trained covert mystery shoppers collected data on antimalarial availability and price, and provider recommended treatment from 200 informal pharmacies selected based on their inferred client load and relative importance in the market.

Survey responses (10 items) were recorded in a DHIS2 mobile app connected to a DHIS2 server.

RESULTS

Eight data collection rounds occurred between March 2016 and December 2017.
- Results showed a strong demand for the products initially, with availability of Green Leaf QAACT increasing from 2% to 68% over the first three rounds, however availability held around 70% for the last three rounds (**Figure 1**).
- By December 2017, Green Leaf QAACT prices were much lower than the pre-intervention baseline QAACT price and lower than non-quality assured ACT prices (**Figure 2**).
- The proportion of providers spontaneously recommending Green Leaf QAACT as treatment for malaria increased from 1% to 30% over the first three rounds and reached 40% by Dec 2017 (**Figure 3**).
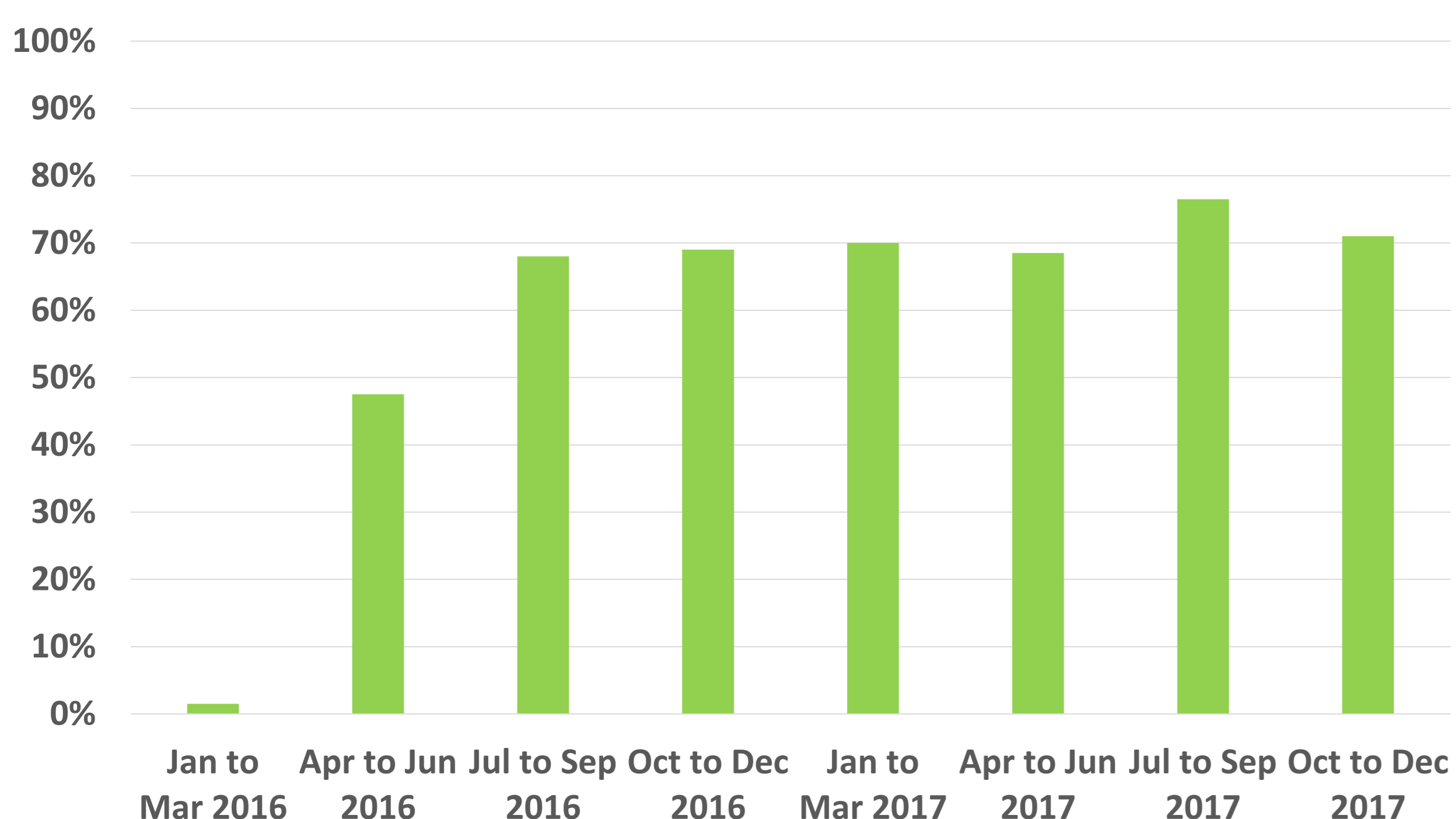
FIG. 1: AVAILABILITY OF GREEN LEAF QAACT

FIG. 2: MEDIAN LOCAL CURRENCY PRICE OF AN ADULT ANTIMALARIAL COURSE SOLD BY PHARMACIES
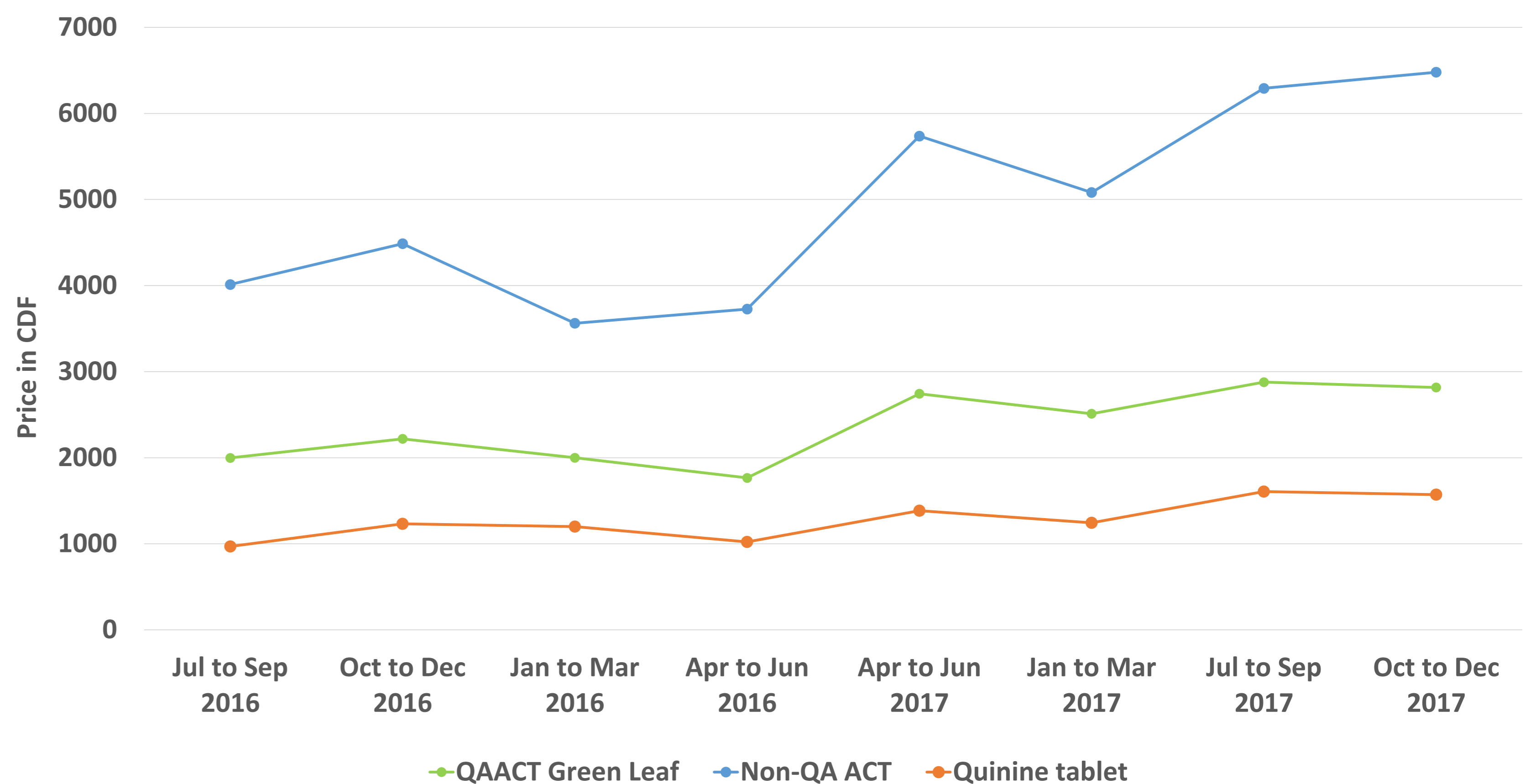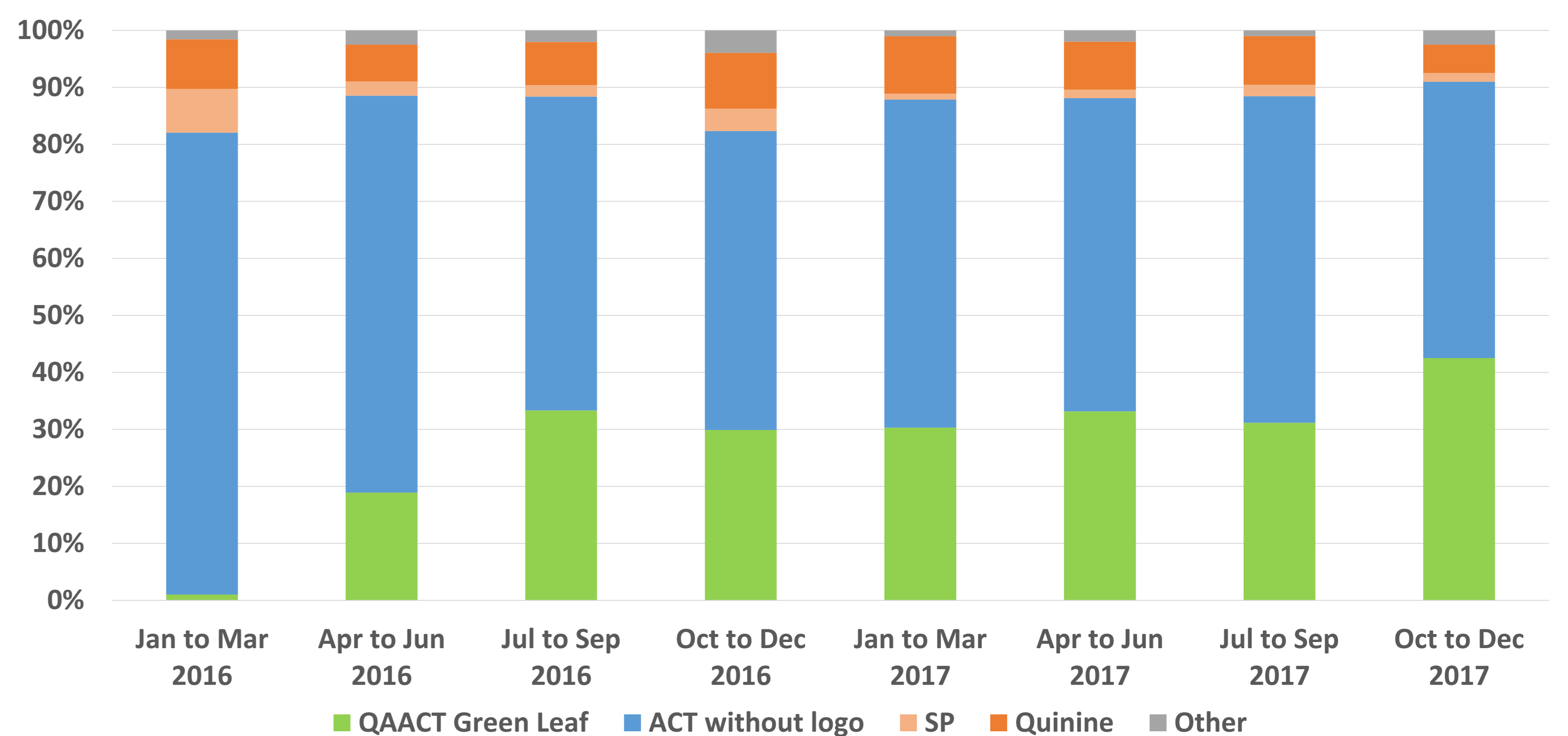

FIG. 3: DISTRIBUTION OF PROVIDER RECOMMENDED TREATMENT FOR MALARIA

CONCLUSION

The mystery shopper survey proved to be an effective source of routine and actionable price and availability data on Green Leaf ACTs. The use of this data by the malaria project management team is commendable and included motivating and sustaining the interest of ACT manufacturers and importers to engage in the DRC market; and ongoing fine-tuning of the project medical detailing strategy, assessing when and where detailers should focus on expanding the number of outlet stocking Green Leaf ACTs and when and where the strategy should shift to focus on provider behaviour change to increase provider-led recommendation of Green Leaf ACTs. These results demonstrate how data can be efficiently used to monitor and improve program performance. Results were also incorporated into routine reporting and regular communication with in-country stakeholders to support evidence-based progress discussions.

In comparison to costly retail audits that often provide data only after a lengthy data entry and analysis period, the routine mystery shopper surveys are a powerful approach to quickly identify and address challenges to a new intervention. We recommend this approach in place of more complex retail studies when more timely information is required to inform decision making.

If interested in learning more about the mystery shopper survey, scan this QR code:

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