

Strengthening health systems through procurement

Team builds local capacity to secure supplies and services

As global financing mechanisms increase country-level responsibility for health care systems, effective procurement practices are viewed as increasingly fundamental components of health sector development. In the absence of strong procurement capacity within the medicine supply chain, for example, public health workers could face stockouts, low-quality medicines or supplies, or even expired or counterfeit goods. Such threats can place people at risk, undermine confidence in public health services, and drain limited resources.

PATH has a robust history of building procurement capacity in a range of settings. We support commodity programs ranging from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the President's Malaria Initiative to country efforts supported by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In all of our work, we strengthen human resources and systems, inform policies and practices, and foster coordination of efforts so countries can more efficiently manage supplies.

PATH's approach

For nearly 20 years, PATH has assisted public-sector programs in carrying out large-scale procurement of medicines, supplies, and equipment for health programs and provided technical assistance to support system efficiencies. Our understanding of programmatic issues and the technical aspects of essential health supplies strengthens these programs' ability to implement activities in a cost-effective and timely manner.

To ensure that critical health commodities reach the people who need them, we work to strengthen links among procurement activities, financing mechanisms, and logistics and distribution systems. This work can involve developing technical specifications, prequalifying products, issuing bids, negotiating contracts, arranging logistics, managing contracts, and monitoring supplier performance. In a number of countries, these activities have resulted in the provision of safe, effective health commodities at reasonable prices, enabling countries to maximize the benefit of scarce health care dollars. PATH's procurement staff work closely with local counterparts at every stage to support the development and use of appropriate tools to plan, implement, and monitor their activities, allowing them to eventually assume greater responsibility and ownership of their procurement functions.

In 2006, for example, PATH provided in-country technical assistance under the USAID-supported DELIVER project to assist the Government of Jordan in procuring condoms for its reproductive health program. The PATH team collaborated with in-country staff and their partners to draft technical specifications and standard operating procedures, identify risk-management issues related to condom quality assurance (QA), and provide recommendations for strengthening the in-country condom QA system.

Project name

PATH's procurement team

Location

Global

Methods

Procurement, logistics management, training, and capacity building

Partners

John Snow, Inc.; Initiatives; Partnership for Supply Chain Management; International HIV/AIDS Alliance; and others

Funders

US Agency for International Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, World Health Organization, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United Nations Population Fund

For more information

Please contact PATH Procurement at 206.285.3500, www.path.org, or procurement@path.org.

Supporting the people in the system

To build capacity in countries with a limited number of skilled procurement staff, PATH develops specialized training materials and guidelines to capture best practices and share knowledge. Our staff have reached hundreds of procurement professionals in more than 30 countries through assessments, strategy development, training, and skill-based support.

PATH works with groups such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID), various United Nations agencies, and organizations already supporting procurement efforts to conceptualize, develop, pilot test, and disseminate a comprehensive toolkit that addresses procurement of reproductive health supplies. The toolkit is aimed at strengthening staff capacity in product and supplier selection and QA and will serve as a cornerstone for future trainings on effective procurement systems.

Policies that help, rather than hinder

Supportive national policies are essential to the operational aspects of procurement as well as program sustainability. Because import taxes and duties, customs requirements, and product quality requirements can have a direct impact on the procurement efficiency and cost of medicines, PATH works with in-country staff and key decision-makers to advocate for policies that help support the process and to develop experience-based plans to help anticipate or overcome obstacles.

For example, PATH collaborated with the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund to develop and facilitate workshops for national procurement and regulatory staff that address the process to prequalify reproductive health medicines and devices. The workshops guided participants on effective use of this process within the procurement context.

Coordinating country efforts

PATH also looks for opportunities to link the efforts of governments and other groups procuring similar types of commodities. These efforts can simplify logistics and increase purchasing power.

Since 2004, for example, PATH has been working with several ministries of health in Africa and the Caribbean to introduce appropriate supplies for promoting injection safety. The Making Medical Injections Safer project addresses the link between syringe reuse and the lack of available supplies. The team developed a procurement strategy for introducing safety syringes and pooling the procurement needs of several countries to secure reduced international pricing. Working in close collaboration with the project's prime contractor, John Snow, Inc., PATH identified specific sustainability challenges and developed tools to measure needs and improve procurement planning.

As a result of these efforts, more than 100 million people in 11 countries have gained reliable access to safe injection supplies in more than 100 district, state, and specialized health facilities, and the safety of an estimated 150 million injections per year has been improved.¹ The strategy has also been instrumental in supporting national safety-syringe policies in Uganda and Nigeria.

Building on success

PATH's procurement activities have improved the cost, quality, and delivery of health care supplies in more than 30 developing countries. Our future activities will continue to focus on building capacity for the long-term management of commodities, ensuring that health systems are ready and equipped to provide consistent and high-quality care.

REFERENCE

1. Simonsen L, Kane A, Lloyd J, et al. Unsafe injections in the developing world and transmission of bloodborne pathogens: a review. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*. 1999;77(10):789–800.

Increasing knowledge and improving service delivery

PATH has developed and contributed to an array of materials supporting best practices and standards for global procurement efforts. Collaborating with organizations such as USAID and John Snow, Inc., these manuals, training curricula, and quality assurance guidelines provide the information programs and organizations need to strengthen and institutionalize procurement skills and the systems they support.

Visit the publications section of the PATH website (www.path.org) to learn more about these and other materials.



PATH is an international nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH's work improves global health and well-being.



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