



COMPASS INITIATIVE SERIES: ADAPTATIONS

Adaptations used to ensure contraceptive access during the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 Adaptations for RH Supplies

Outline

- Background
- Approach
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Key Learnings and Observations
- Looking Ahead

Background

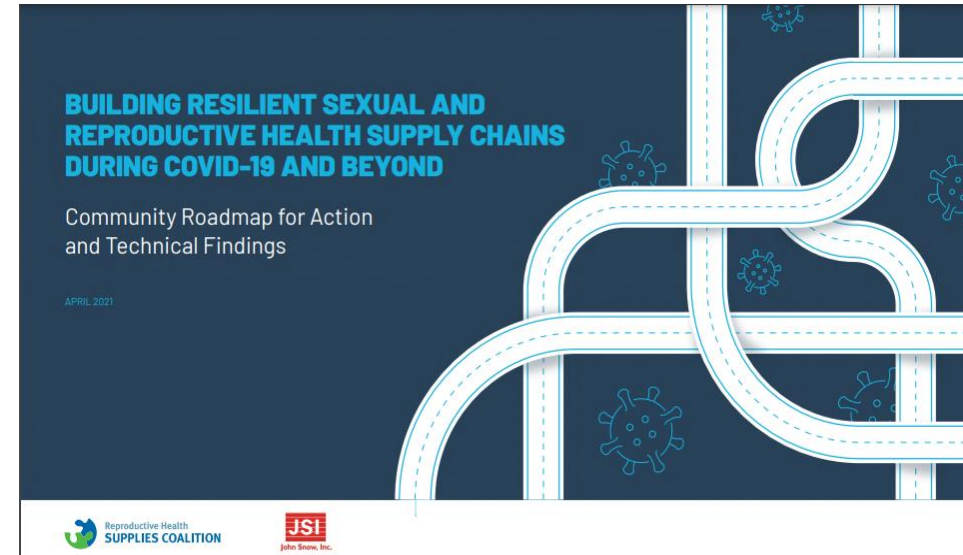
RHSC engaged [inSupply Health](#) to conduct an assessment of adaptation strategies used to ensure access to RH supplies in the pandemic. This assessment included the development of a strategic framework of adaptation strategies planned and/or used to ensure access to RH supplies during the pandemic, with country-specific examples.

Background

Governments worldwide used various techniques, including social isolation and mobility restrictions, to combat the spread of COVID-19 in the first few months of the outbreak; This led to significant disruptions across sectors, including healthcare supply chains.

The Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC) and John Snow, Inc. (JSI) published a Roadmap Study in April 2021 to promote more resilient supply chains and marketplaces for reproductive health products during and after the pandemic. The study highlighted the domino effect of COVID-19 disruptions and the interdependence of supply chain operations. Its recommendations included documenting, supporting, and scaling up successful pandemic adaptation initiatives to ensure access to supplies.

This Compass Initiative resource assesses strategic supply chain adaptations that have been explored, attempted, or executed, examining their implementation and sustainability, and providing lessons for the RH community. The goal is to improve RH supply chain resilience and performance both now and in the future.



Approach

The assessment included the development of a strategic framework of adaptation strategies planned and/or used to ensure access to RH supplies during the pandemic, with country-specific examples.

Approach: Scope & Methodology



Figure 1: Scope & Methodology

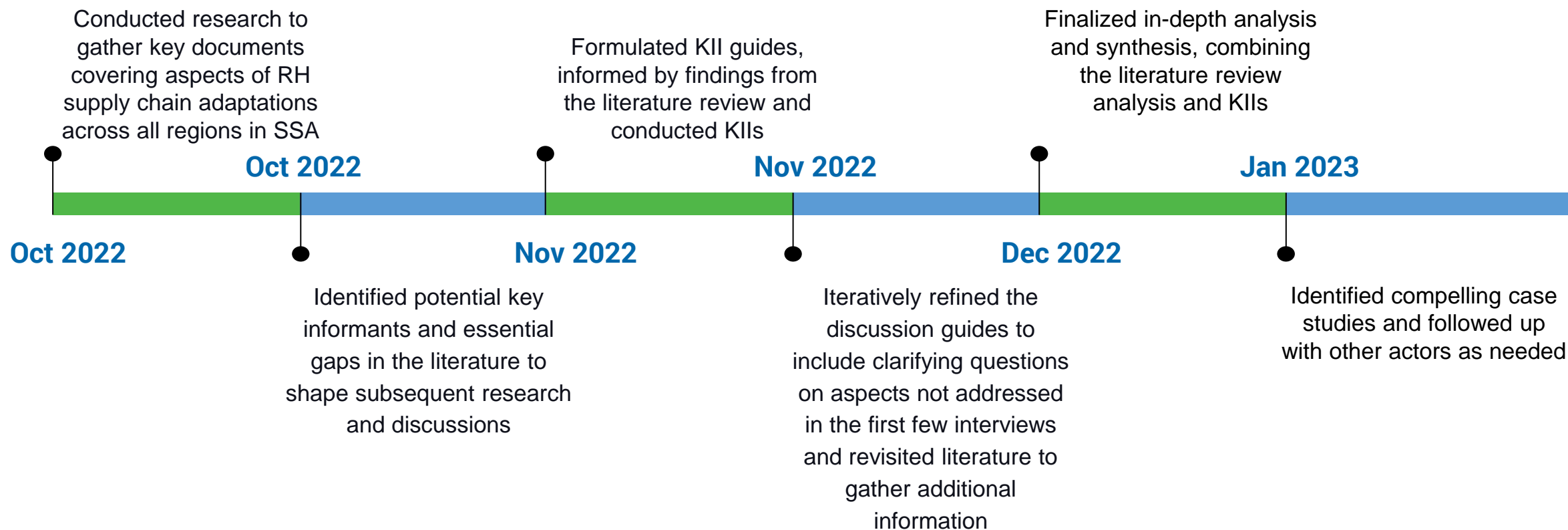
Literature Review

- Between October 2022 and January 2023, 85 documents from 30 countries across SSA were analyzed, including peer-reviewed publications, program resources and reports, interactive maps, and webinar recordings.
- Literature review primarily focused on RH supply chains and RH programming adaptations made during the pandemic to provide services and carry out program activities.
- Initial findings revealed that most of these adaptations were developed to address service delivery constraints, with some that were difficult to separate from supply chain-specific adaptations.

Key Informant Interviews

- From November 2022 to January 2023, inSupply conducted 26 key informant interviews (KIIs) in 19 countries in SSA.
- KIIs explored the challenges faced by the respondents, the adaptations undertaken, and whether these adaptations were continued or discarded.
- Illustrations of these adaptations were presented from across SSA.
- 4 key sectors were featured: Global manufacturers; NGOs; Implementation partners; and Social Marketing Organizations
- Interviews examined the challenges encountered, the adaptations undertaken, whether they were discarded and why, whether they were implemented and sustained, and the reasons why they sustained.

Timeline



Findings

This report shares all findings from the assessment and focuses on examining strategic supply chain adaptations that have been considered, attempted, or implemented, if they have been sustained or discarded, and the lessons that can be learned by the RH community.

The insights from this report aim to improve the resilience and performance of supply chains now and in preparation for future crises.

Strategic Adaptation Framework

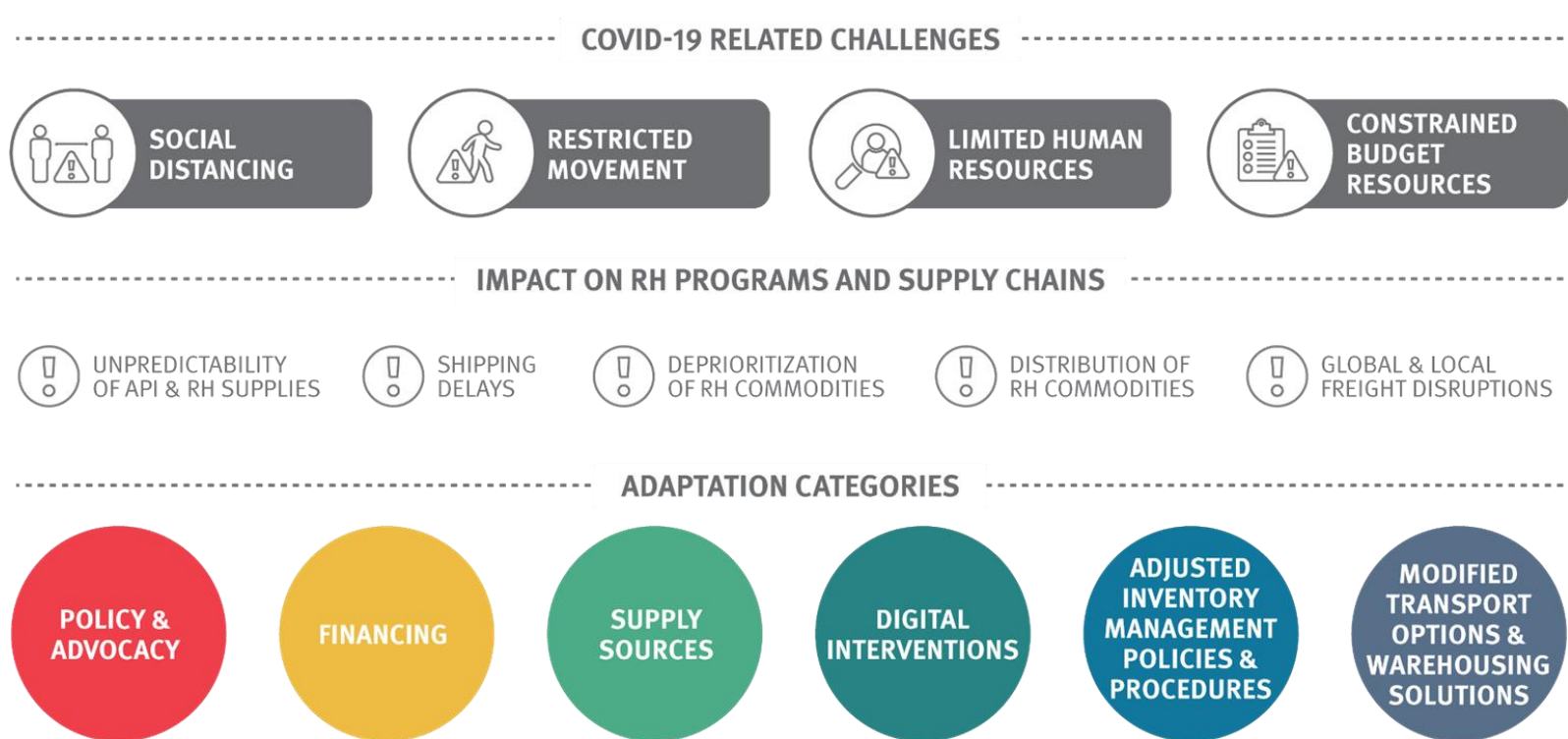


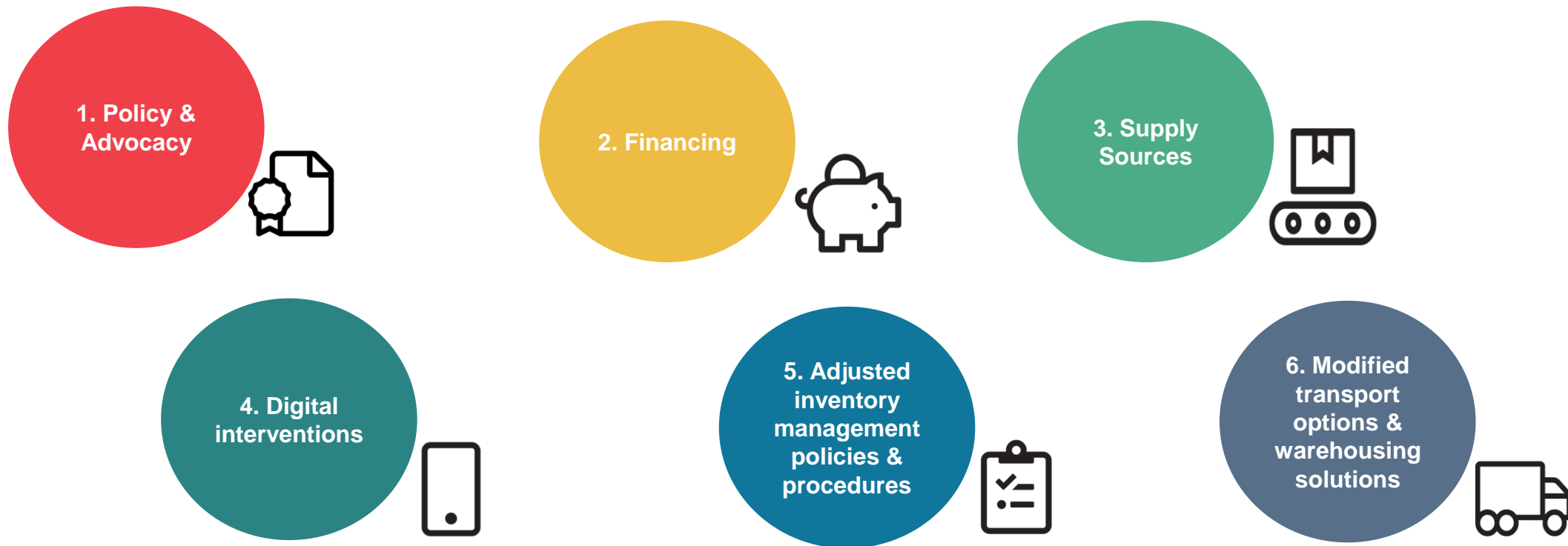
Figure 2 Strategic framework of adaptations

The strategic framework identifies actions that were taken to respond to challenges and minimize disruption of access to products and services. There are three levels of the framework:

- The **COVID-19-related challenges** to the delivery of health products and services across the globe e.g. social distancing, restricted movement/travel, limited human resources, and constrained budgets.
- The **impact on RH programs and supply chains** on areas such as human resources and PPE for service provision and supervision, in-country commodity distribution, and global supply and logistics
- The **strategic adaptations** implemented in different countries by NGOs, multilateral partners, governments, SMOs, and IPs.

Strategic Adaptations

Several themes emerged during the analysis, leading us to define six categories of supply chain adaptation strategies that were planned and/or applied to ensure access to RH supplies in the pandemic:



Policy & Advocacy

1. Policy &
Advocacy



COMPASS INITIATIVE SERIES: ADAPTATIONS

Modify COVID-19 guidelines and directives to facilitate movement of people and products required for essential services

Challenge

Due to government policies and the health impacts of COVID-19, organizations faced human resources constraints across the supply chain and health system.

Cargo and shipments were significantly delayed in arrival and processing due to the lack of services available at ports.

Some ports were shut down temporarily, which led to cargo being redirected or delayed.

Adaptation

- Issuing personnel with “COVID-19 passes” (labeled differently across each country) that would allow their movement despite lockdowns.
- Enacting policies to enable the movement of people and commodities by classifying RH services as essential.
- Using online platforms for RH advocacy of continued RH service delivery with stakeholders.

Sustainability

“COVID-19 passes” for travel were not needed after geographic lockdowns were lifted.

Following early implementation, the classification of healthcare workers as essential staff was highlighted and sustained beyond the pandemic.

After national guidelines that deemed RH an essential service were issued, supply chain disruptions were reported to have improved.



“...the port being closed had to do with both social distancing requirements, the restricted movement, so you didn’t have the human resources running the port and therefore they could not receive the shipment at that time...” Global Manufacturer



Revised national policies to enable RH commodity access, including community-based distribution and updated dispensing protocols

Challenge

Many policies and laws that were initially established as safeguards for quality assurance became hindrances to accessing RH commodities and services at the community level.

Adaptation

Policies were passed to allow community-based distribution (CBD) of contraceptives, which reversed the slowing demand seen early in the pandemic.

Some countries adjusted their policies on dispensing protocols for short-acting methods, offering clients multi-month dispensing with the similar effect of reducing the number of clients seeking products and services at health facilities.

Sustainability

There are recommendations to adopt multi-month packs at the manufacturing stage for sustainability and ease of implementation. Community-based strategies were successful and proved to be cost-effective as was the case in Ghana; however, scale-up and national integration cannot be achieved without significant budget resources.



“...the thing that changed is they [ministries] allowed community-based workers, CHVs, to go to the village, distribute pills, and even do injections. So it meant there was a lot of stock that had to be pushed downward...” GHSC-PSM, Ghana



Financing

2. Financing



Manufacturers and Social Marketing Organizations absorb additional short-term costs

Challenge

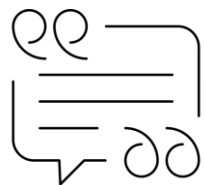
Pharmaceutical manufacturers saw increased costs and reduced profit margins in part due to global cargo constraints that drove freight rates up on shipments of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and other components

Adaptation

Four pharmaceutical manufacturers in long-term agreements with their clients did not seek to renegotiate contracts in line with rising unit costs and decided to absorb the additional costs, accepting lower profit margins for the short term and meeting commitments to all customers. SMOs opted to accept lower margins rather than pass down the cost increase to their clients.

Sustainability

The adaptation was not sustainable as it had negative financial results for manufacturers and SMOs. It was implemented as short-term action to avoid the creation of additional disruptions and bottlenecks in an already stressed supply system. Manufacturers have reported that they cannot financially absorb the higher costs indefinitely.



“...we had to be more proactive and order in advance, there was more risk from a financial perspective, because knowing the timeline was longer we had to buy more stock and take chances that the demand would be there...” SMO, Kenya and Uganda



Leverage partnerships for funding and increase investment in RH products

Challenge

In the early stages of the pandemic, government and donor budgets earmarked for FP were significantly slashed, up to 50% in some cases, in favor of responding to the pandemic. A number of MOHs faced RH supply gaps due to this slashed budget that threatened to disrupt programming and training for service providers.

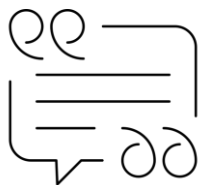
Adaptation

MOHs through partnerships with Implementing Partners, requested additional support from bilateral and multilateral partners, and other donors to address RH supply gaps.

Partnership and collaboration among local organizations and stakeholders in the RH space continued to enhance procurement and access to services.

Sustainability

Reliable and strong partnerships proved invaluable in addressing potential shortages and supporting the continuation of programs and training.



“...During an epidemic, another company can help NMS. Services can be divided accordingly and JMS only supplies laboratory equipment, MOH handles immunization and NMS can supply general medicine. NMS supplies even stationary so this can be supplied by another company...” Store Manager, Uganda



Supply Sources



Negotiate with suppliers of raw materials and components to increase inventories

Challenge

The supply chain disruptions combined with increased demand for key APIs and components resulted in supply shortages and ultimately manufacturing constraints for RH manufacturers.

Some RH products were in direct competition for raw materials and manufacturing components such as latex used for both condoms and personal protective equipment (PPE) and vials for injectable contraceptives and vaccines.

Adaptation

Interviewed manufacturing companies tried to secure pricing and quantities by using agreements such as memorandums of understanding (MOUs) along with their long-term contracts with suppliers of APIs and other manufacturing components (e.g., vials, packaging cartons, etc.)

Other companies placed large advance orders for the different components needed in manufacturing their RH products and stored more raw materials on site.

Sustainability

While some elements of this approach were meant as temporary solutions, such as ordering larger quantities, some elements have remained.

Further down the supply chain, buyers and importers recognize the dependencies on not only their suppliers, but the suppliers of their suppliers and are considering these upstream risks in their future planning.



“...In some of the countries you know because of the local situations that they had, there were subsequent delays in getting the raw materials...The logistics cost or the cost of getting these raw materials from different countries was extremely high. Essentially, you know, [our solution] was a revising of the planning schedules to understand what the suppliers can deliver...” Global Manufacturer



Explore the use of alternative suppliers

Challenge

Manufacturing materials shortages, combined with the personnel shortages due to COVID-19 case rates and lockdowns, as well as other constraints resulted in delays in order fulfillment from manufacturers

Adaptation

Organizations sought to fill gaps by establishing relationships with new suppliers. This strategy aimed to diversify the supply base and reduce risk considering that different regions and suppliers were experiencing the effects of pandemic at different times.

For example, PSK located an alternative condom manufacturer in a different part of India which was experiencing lower infection rates, and engaged them as a second supplier.

Sustainability

PSK has continued to use both manufactures of male condoms since the pandemic. Alternative sources of supply can be an effective strategy for reducing risk; however, the cost and performance of new suppliers must also be considered.



“...there was another strategy. We included them in terms of getting alternative suppliers you know like for some of these commodities there as we found in India itself. There's one region of India that was heavily impacted by COVID. So, we found another supplier based in Mumbai. At least for condoms, you know like the regulator is a little bit flexible in terms of the sites that you can get condoms from yeah...” SMO, Kenya



Digital Interventions

4. Digital
interventions



Adopt digital platforms for training, orientations, and supervision for service delivery

Challenge

Faced with mandated movement restrictions, organizations had limited ability to convene groups of supply chain and healthcare practitioners to carry out training, supervision, and other capacity-building activities that ensure continuity and quality in the provision of RH services and products.

Adaptation

Several organizations adopted virtual platforms to ensure the continuity of services and availability of RH products and to minimize disruptions in supply chains. As one example, PATH through the Access Collaborative project, worked with the MOHs and regional management teams in DRC, Madagascar, and Senegal to conduct regional orientation meetings in small groups and outdoor settings to advance the introduction of online courses on the self-injection of DMPA-SC in the countries.

Sustainability

Many organizations that have adopted digital platforms to support service delivery have continued to use them, even when movement restrictions were removed. They established new ways to communicate and share information with providers and clients that were additive to the existing systems.



“...So what we did in Nigeria, was we moved to a lot of digital adaptations where we were doing a lot of our programming online. We were doing training with providers via WhatsApp and even supportive supervisory visits...” GHSC-PSM, Nigeria



Amend or develop processes and tools for streamlined, virtual decision making

Challenge

At the start of lockdowns, many organizations shifted to “working from home” due to movement restrictions. For manufacturers with global supply chains and products produced in different countries, the inability to work with their teams centrally or convene cross-functional committees challenged their ability to coordinate and make timely decisions and approvals, and effectively manage their supply chains.

Adaptation

Organizations quickly adopted digital platforms to enable collaboration among their now dispersed teams and to re-capture efficiencies that may have been lost with the sudden shift to remote work. One manufacturer noted that adopting these platforms was crucial for convening committees for cross-functional decisions and approvals, and timely communication and coordination across global teams. The use of tools such as digital signatures helped streamline approvals and workflow.

Sustainability

Many of the digital platforms and tools that were adopted continue to be in use. Many organizations have been able to increase efficiencies through the use of these new tools and processes and have incorporated them into their operations. This adaptation has been sustained, and it allows faster decision-making and more efficient management of supply chains.



“...Our manufacturing is done in different countries and restriction of movement meant we could not work centrally in the office....” -RH Manufacturer, global



Adjusted inventory management policies & procedures

5. Adjusted inventory management policies & procedures



Adjust inventory levels and reorder frequency

Challenge

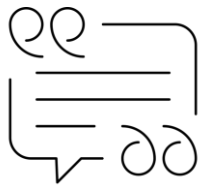
Disruptions throughout global health supply chains resulted in longer and unpredictable lead times for RH products, which threatened stock availability in countries in SSA.

Adaptation

Across a number of organizations, a common adaptation was to re-evaluate order levels to accommodate longer and unpredictable lead times and to maximize stock availability. This was especially true for condoms, which before the pandemic had shorter lead times and were not necessarily being ordered in large quantities due to their bulkiness in packaging and storage space requirements.

Sustainability

Most of these adaptations were implemented as temporary measures to address what was hoped to be a short-term supply issue. As such, inventory levels continue to be monitored and adjusted as the global supply situation readjusts.



“...Increasing the frequency of monitoring our inventory from quarterly to monthly has been a very successful initiative and we have sustained it because we realize that it has more benefits even without COVID-19. So that has been sustained...” Ouagadougou Partnership, 15 West African countries



Commodity redistribution within and across countries

Challenge

Unpredictable demand and supply led to supply imbalances within and across countries. In-country transport challenges were mainly attributed to the lack of finances to procure fuel to travel to every healthcare facility for outreach and to distribute RH commodities. Global cargo constraints limited international freight options, adding further uncertainty to supply lines.

Adaptation

A common response to disrupted supply chains and associated RH product shortages was the introduction of initiatives to redistribute RH commodities from overstocked areas to undersupplied or stocked-out regions. This adaptation was used nationally, between countries, and regionally, as well as across public and private sectors within countries.

Sustainability

Redistribution was reported as not being sustained due to the additional costs required. Adequate support with means of transportation, fuel, and personnel to complete last-mile delivery is crucial for sustaining this practice.



*“...I used to liaise with those implementing partners, especially the Clinton Health Access Initiative which helped us very much They used to come here and ask “we are going to this facility, do you have anything?” Actually Clinton Health Access Initiative is more effective in those issues of redistribution so they used to come, and you can give them commodities and they deliver to health facilities that are in the direction they are going to.” - District Store Manager, Uganda
...”*



Modified transport options & warehousing solutions

6. Modified transport options & warehousing solutions



Expand warehousing and increase storage space

Challenge

RH suppliers like the SMOs reported increasing their inventory levels, up to three times the normal level, to buffer against uncertainties in commodity distribution and in supply lead times. Existing warehouse capacity became insufficient to accommodate the significant increases in inventory levels, particularly for bulky items like male condoms. The influx of COVID-19 supplies such as PPE placed additional constraints on existing storage space.

Adaptation

Manufacturers and SMOs secured additional warehouse space to accommodate increases in stock levels and shifted warehouse locations to enable more efficient use of all warehouse space. However, in some instances, relocation of warehousing facilities led to cost savings of up to 30% as reported by PSK, due to the cost differential in lease rates and warehousing costs.

Sustainability

In some cases, the adaptation became a permanent solution as both manufacturers and SMOs expanded and relocated warehouses. In other instances, leveraging partners and short-term contracting for inventory surges were temporary solutions, but may be incorporated into risk management and contingency plans in the future. For example in Kenya, PSK's new warehousing location was sustained and was reported as producing positive unexpected benefits.



“...We have limited storage space in our warehouse. So, we had to reorder more quantities. That required us to get extra space because some of these products are really bulky. The condoms are really bulky stuff. So we had to hire temporary space just to increase our order level...” SMO, Kenya



Utilize new distribution and service delivery channels for accessing RH products and services

Challenge

Movement restrictions hindered clients from obtaining their RH products from health facilities and healthcare workers from staffing these facilities. Many countries saw an important shift in clients choosing to access RH products from retail pharmacies or via e-commerce and telemedicine providers.

Adaptation

Pharmacies, SMOs, and telemedicine providers adopted the use of motorbikes as a quick and reliable method to deliver RH products or customized orders that included RH, straight to consumers' homes. Given the fear of visiting healthcare facilities due to COVID-19 exposure risks and government restrictions, many clients sought to access RH products, mainly oral contraceptives and male condoms, through online shopping.

Sustainability

Online marketplaces and door-to-door deliveries for RH commodities have been sustained, improving convenience and method choice. It's important to track the client's digital journey and user experience with RH service delivery and to understand barriers that prevent clients from adopting online platforms. A high degree of innovation is crucial for developing sustainable solutions at the last mile.



“...During the COVID, there was more use of the mobile phone because the client did not need to go to the facility... They could just call and they got to engage with the service provider...” -FHI360, Kenya



Recommendations

To capture these nuances of how adaptations were applied and enable ease of reference for all supply chain stakeholders, we contextualized them within the Supply Chain Operations Reference Digital Standard (SCOR-DS) model processes.

Framework in Context

The [SCOR-DS](#), an accepted industry standard supply chain model, provides methodology, diagnostic and benchmarking tools to assist organizations in making dramatic and rapid improvements in supply chain processes. It describes the business activities in all stages of satisfying customer demand.

The modified SCOR-DS model depicted in Figure 3 visually incorporates the findings from our work on pandemic-related challenges that impacted RH supply access, the impact on RH programs and supply chains, and the adaptations themselves. It is explained in greater detail below

The Outer-Ring of the framework visualizes the broad challenges to the delivery of health products and services across the globe caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They include social distancing, restricted movement/travel, limited human resources, and constrained budgets.

The double-infinity loop illustrates that a supply chain is an ever-moving series of activities, with no artificial starts or stops from process to process. The SCOR-DS model comprises seven key management processes: orchestrate, plan, source, transform, order, fulfill, and return.

The inner circles

The final element of the double infinity loop consists of the innermost circles, each of which represents an adaptation category. Each circle is placed in the respective supply chain management process that is relevant to the adaptation.

Lower chain

The lower section of the illustration depicts the foundations on which strong supply chains stand, namely market drivers, end-to-end visibility, and collaboration across the entire supply chain.

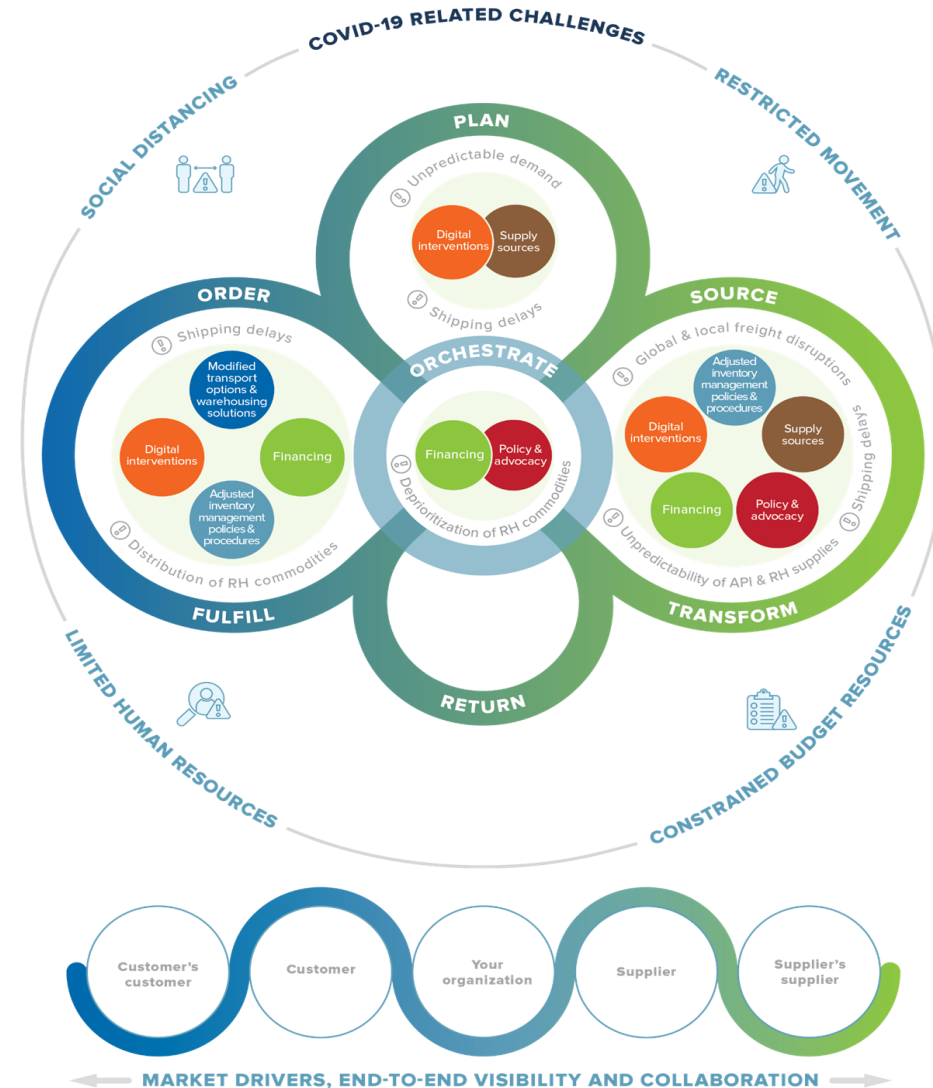


Figure 3 Strategic framework of adaptations

Framework in Context

- **Orchestrate**

Strategic adaptations focused on financing decisions and policy advocacy to ensure ongoing access to reproductive health products and services.

- **Plan**

Innovative use of digital platforms and technologies by health supply chain actors facilitated successful coordination across teams, commercial partners, service providers, and patients. They used existing networks, engaged partners, and capitalized on strengths to increase visibility and reduce risks.

- **Source & Transform**

Manufacturers campaigned for special status and waivers to ensure business continuity during lockdowns and restrictions. They reviewed investment policies, focusing on capital and pricing and expedited decision-making using digital tools. To navigate uncertain supply scenarios, buyers sought alternative supply sources and created alliances.

- **Order & Fulfill**

Buyers, importers, and country actors made several kinds of adjustments to deal with shipping delays and uncertain supply. They used and modified digital solutions to improve inventory visibility, identify shortages or excesses, and speed decision-making.

Key Learnings & Observations

1. Policy & Advocacy



- ❑ **Early engagements** and activities to prioritize RH services and access were critical to facilitate the movement of essential personnel for RH supplies and maintain client access to RH products and services.
- ❑ Comprehensive policies to assure continuity in access to RH products and services should be **designed and enacted in advance of emergency** situations, to include considerations for supply chains.

2. Financing



- ❑ Emergencies necessarily have an unexpected financial impact. Pooling resources and exploring new partnerships may **unlock access to funds** and resources.
- ❑ **Co-financing mitigated** the diversion of resources away from RH programming during emergencies and served as an effective long-term strategy to support governments to increase their overall budgets for RH commodities.

3. Supply Sources



- ❑ The absence of local RH manufacturers likely disadvantaged SSA as 100% of RH supplies are imported from outside the continent. The **localization of suppliers and decision-making** supports resilient supply chains.
- ❑ RH product **self-reliance on the continent** is imperative. There's an opportunity to facilitate discussions between key stakeholders to ensure RH supply self-reliance is prioritized at the onset of self-reliance conversations.



Key Learnings & Observations

4. Digital interventions



- ❑ Digital interventions enabled data visibility and use and unlocked responsiveness, resilience, and agility. **Timely and complete data visibility** across multiple stakeholders enables products to be redistributed within countries and regions, informs changes in inventory and ordering procedures and supports the identification of alternative supply sources, ultimately maximizing product availability.

5. Adjusted inventory management policies & procedures



- ❑ The adaptations to logistics management procedures adopted at the global and country level – including adjusting inventory levels and reorder periods and redistribution of products – illustrated that a more **agile approach to logistics management** could help to counter global supply disruptions.

6. Modified transport options & warehousing solutions

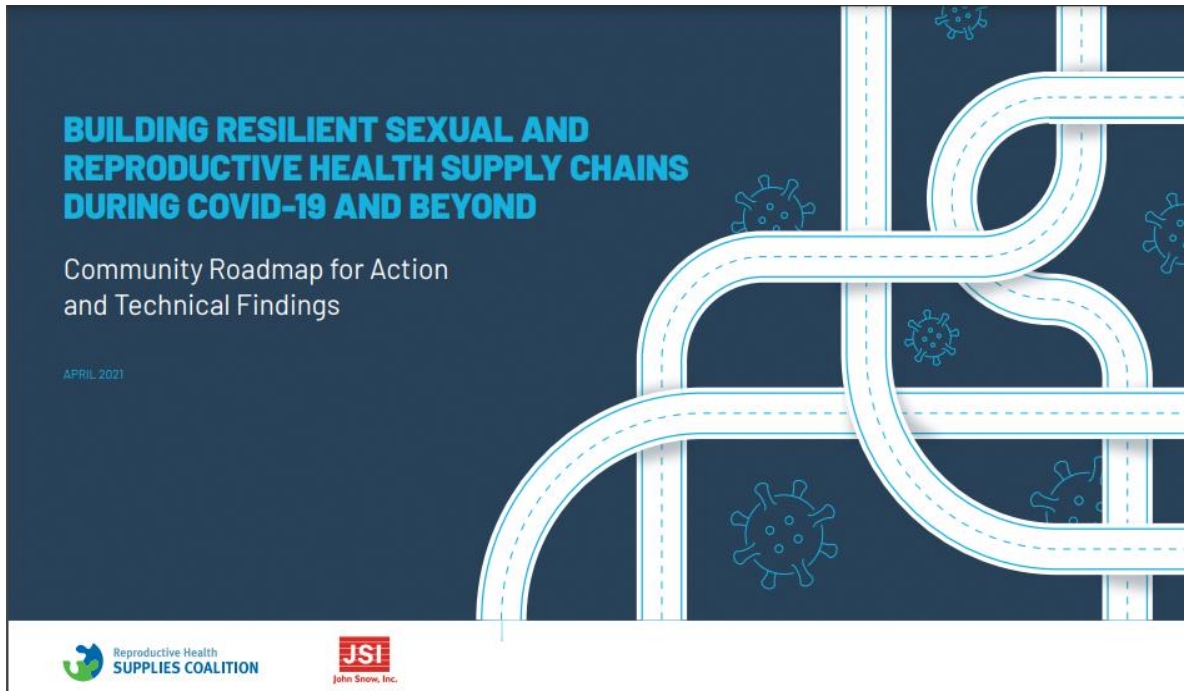


- ❑ Actors throughout the supply chain were able to take practical decisions about moving and **storing inventory and orders** to ensure supply and reach clients.
- ❑ Provision of quality RH services and supplies through **community based distribution** and **mobile outreach programs**, including when integrated with other healthcare services, as appropriate is a cost effective strategy in emergency situations.



Looking Ahead

Further Reading...



Community Roadmap for Action



High Impact Practice in FP