
State of the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition

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Introduction

Honorable Joint Secretary of Health and Family Welfare, Mrs. Anuradha Gupta, Colleagues, Friends, and members of the Coalition family,

It is, indeed, the greatest honour for the Coalition to be hosted by the Government of India, and to meet here under its auspices. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Mrs. Gupta for being here on behalf of her government, and for giving her support to our lifesaving work.

Paris optimism

Exactly one year ago, we met in Paris at our 13th Membership Meeting, hosted by the French government. And as many of you will recall, the mood was buoyant with an uncommon optimism. We were still riding the wave of the London Family Planning Summit; the promise of a transformational FP2020; and -- of course -- the growing momentum behind the UN Commission on Life Saving Commodities.

We were also celebrating the then recent arrival of 200th member.

And we were still euphoric over the results of an independent evaluation that couldn't have been more effusive in its praise for the Coalition and our work.

And finally, we were, at that moment, engaged in discussions with our donor community to help support a new agenda - more ambitious than anything we had ever taken on before.

Optimism surpassed

Yet, we could have never have known, back in Paris, that our achievements of this last year would out-dazzle even the highest of our expectations. You know, we often speak about what it means to deliver "value for money". It's one of those things that's hard to define – even harder to measure. But when you see it – you recognize it right away.

Well, this year we saw value for money throughout the work of the Coalition and our partners.

In November, we witnessed months of hard work coming to fruition with the successful completion of the Implanon Access Initiative. We saw the price of Implanon drop by nearly 20 percent, yielding total savings of over \$15M and rebates to procurers of more than \$6M. In the months to come, we would see further - even more dramatic - price reductions – both of



Implanon and Jadelle. But I am proud to say that the Coalition broke the first piece of ground which is fast becoming a clear path into the future.

This year also saw another child of the Coalition – the Pledge Guarantee of Health -- secure from the US and Swedish governments guarantees of \$50M that will allow it to expedite the disbursement of donor funds and, in the process, make global health supplies more accessible and more affordable for developing countries. We also saw four manufacturers – Cupid, Merck, Pregna, and CCI – step up to the plate and agree to absorb the financing costs whenever PGH accelerates delivery of their products. And with the help of these and other partners, PGH is building a pipeline of potentially \$20M in RH procurements.

Indeed, leveraging has been an unmistakable theme this year. In particular, we saw our Innovation Fund plant the seeds of new ideas and give real meaning to the old expression “from tiny acorns do mighty oaks grow”. Last year, PSI Burundi received a small grant of \$40,000 to explore the prospects for social franchising and to maximize the total market for family planning products and services. I remember when I interviewed the local PSI Director, Beth Brogaard, about her Innovation Fund award, she emphasized the role it had played in allowing them to do their homework before approaching the wider donor community for large-scale support. “Donors will gladly fund success”, she said, “but rarely do they have the appetite for the critical fact-checking needed to ensure that success.” For small, indigenous NGOs, that dilemma is especially problematic, because “rarely do such organizations have the resources to self-finance such endeavors – especially ones with any risk involved”. Well, I’m happy to share with you some good news. Just last week, we learned from Beth that the homework supported by our small grant allowed PSI Burundi to secure from the Dutch government additional support for a new social franchising, total market initiative. And the value of that support? Over \$6M, or 150 times the original investment. Now that is what I call value for money.

We also talk a great deal in the Coalition about the power of partnership. And there is no end to the examples one might draw on to demonstrate what such partnership can achieve. But I am again drawn to the one institution within the Coalition that perhaps demonstrates better than any what can be achieved by partners working together, sharing knowledge, pooling resources towards a common goal – and that is the CARhs (Coordinated Assistance for Reproductive health supplies). For those of you not familiar with it, the CARhs brings together key commodity suppliers to address short-term supply crises that periodically befall countries. This year, under the management of UNFPA, the CARhs saw on the horizon some impending -- and even actual -- stockouts of the injectable contraceptive, Depo Provera. Together with the manufacturer Pfizer, USAID, the USAID | DELIVER project, and UNFPA successfully coordinated pending orders and existing product stock and spearheaded the transfer of 2M units of Depo Provera, thereby allowing five sub-Saharan African countries to prevent stockouts and deliver the means to prevent 142,857 unwanted pregnancies..



Our regional fora have witnessed their own power of partnership at work. Last June, I attended the Second Annual Meeting of our Latin American forum where ninety participants from nine countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region joined together to launch and operationalize the LAC Forum's new strategic plan. The meeting introduced our new Lima-based Regional Facilitator and it showcased a host of initiatives funded by the LAC Forum's own Innovation Fund, the Fondo LAC. Among these was a new advocacy video in Spanish on commodity security in Latin America, *Con las manos vacías*, which will premiere in this very hall in just a few minutes.

Donors as key partners

Now it is true that the future of the Coalition rests in the hands of our country-level partners. But it is equally important to remember that so much of our work is fuelled by our donors, who are also very much our partners. Without the support of the donor community, all that we do would be simply inconceivable. I am proud to say that our donor partners have not just supported us; they have validated our work and our presence, hand over fist, with their generosity and encouragement.

By October of last year, we had submitted eight funding proposals for the far-reaching and ambitious work to be done. By April, six of these funding requests had been granted, for a total sum that far exceeded our requests. This is simply an overwhelmingly clear mandate. We are struck by their faith in us and we are eager to rise to the challenge.

Challenges

But these remarkable achievements do not mean we are naïve about the difficulties around us. For all the positive developments, the world is a very different place today than it was a year ago. The breakneck speed at which the reproductive health supplies issue has taken centre-stage is astonishing. Almost overnight, new players have emerged, global movements have mushroomed and the media juggernauts have thundered across the terrain. While this might bode well, it has also made for an unfamiliar, often confusing landscape that many have struggled to negotiate. In times like this, strategic action invariably takes a backseat to opportunism, and with such a fever-pitch of activity comes anxiety and bewilderment. More questions have riddled the community than answers for some time now.

What only we can do

As always, the Coalition's members turn to us for answers, for guideposts. And as always, we have stepped up to the plate, putting our vantage point in the community to good use and being a constant source of clarification and information for our community through newsletters, e-blasts and online platforms such as the Knowledge Gateway.

At the same time, however, we have also had to take a long hard look at where the Coalition stands in the midst of this whirlwind. It has been a time of honesty and a good measure of soul-searching.



If we are to have any impact at all, if lives are to be saved by our work, it is of utmost importance that we are clear about who we are; what we do; where we belong; and what role we should play.

And that is why this year's efforts to refresh our strategic plan have been so absolutely critical. This effort, which has drawn on members from across the Coalition, has forced us to stop, listen and think. It has allowed us to identify and focus on what it is - the drivers of change - that have brought us success to date: our convening power, our neutral space, our brain trust of experts, our flexibility and our respected brand. These are the elements that together make us unique. And so it absolutely critical that these drivers help shape our aspirations, keep our feet on the ground, and ensure that we do what it is only we can do.

4 Objectives

As many of you will have heard me say over the past few days, this year we embarked on a new way of working – one that moves beyond, but also complements, the largely supportive role we have employed to add value to the work of our members. Yes, we will continue to “lead from behind”: by seeding new ideas through the Innovation Fund; by increasing support to LAPTOP scholars. And we will continue backing-up our working groups, regional initiatives and caucuses. In short, we will continue providing the institutional mortar that binds us together – through meetings, more effective communication, allocation of resources, and better knowledge management.

But evolving as we have into the world's largest partnership of RH organizations also means larger responsibilities. The fact is, today, we are in a unique position to be more proactive, to leverage our visibility, maximize our brain trust, and exercise our neutrality - to confront head-on the very real challenges that prevent women and men from accessing the RH supplies they need.

And so this year, we launched three new initiatives, each headed up by Senior Technical Officers within the Secretariat, and each one aimed at redressing key supply challenges confronting our field today:

1. Combatting the supply stockouts that leave so many would-be-contraceptive users empty-handed;
2. Shaping the market to ensure greater access to the products women and men want; and
3. Helping partners to deliver on the supply commitments they make: to themselves, their countries; and the international community.



Now none of these areas, by any means, are virgin territory to any of us in this room. But by leveraging the drivers of change at our disposal, by harnessing the power of partnership, we can better match complex problems with the complex solutions they require.

We know, for example, that there is no shortage of proven strategies for filling product pipelines. And yet despite that, stockouts still continue to plague our work. And they do so, at least in part, because our initial anger and frustration at stockouts cools and gradually succumbs to limited or unsustainable resources, indifference, or competing concerns. So for us, addressing stockouts begins, not as a technical fix, but by winning the hearts and minds of those who can make a real difference. By getting partners around the world to speak the same language, to become enraged, and then engaged. By leveraging public support to apply the solutions we know can work but also to test new and innovative approaches. This is not the work of just one institution or one sector or one working group. It is a challenge that calls upon the combined strengths of us all.

Similarly, we have seen in the last decade an abundance of commitments made by governments and other players, to improve the reproductive health of women and their families. These acts - and indeed the international events that spawn them - offer the promise of a better life for millions of women and men around the world. And encouraging governments to make and fulfill those promises is critical. But our desire to see these promises fulfilled does not endow us with the authority to view them as debts to us. It does not give us the right to patrol nor to dole out chastisements.

Our new commitments initiative aims to turn the old model of blame and shame on its head. Our aim is not to render governments accountable to the international community – but rather to hold the international community accountable for realizing the aspirations of the Global South.

For us, national commitments can be powerful levers of change in a country – not because of the watchful eyes of the outside world, but because they can bring together players from all walks of life in a common cause. By working with partners at country level, we want to bring together the technical skills needed to translate aspirations into action, celebrate the successes of governments that take appropriate action, and ensure those successes are replicated globally.

There is no doubt that the future of contraceptive security rests with our partners in the Global South and, in particular, on action by national governments, civil society, and the private sector. It also rests on a more effective and efficient market — a market that encourages new entrants and minimizes unnecessary risk, but that also yields benefits in cost, quality, access, and choice. And once again, we see ourselves playing a catalytic role. Using our global network, convening power, and neutral space, we want to reduce information gaps. And we want to do so by consolidating and disseminating critical data about the market, and by carrying on the tradition



of working with manufacturers on key issues such as price, quality, production volumes, market entry, and registration. And lastly to support opportunities to expand innovative financing, total market initiatives, and other related member-driven activities.

Tested partnerships

How can we be sure that our partners will stay the course to the distant goal? What makes us rely on them with such confidence? The particular strength of the Coalition is that it is built on tried, trusted, time-strengthened relationships; deep friendships and commitment to a common goal.

And that is what makes this meeting so unique. Despite its formal setting, despite the magnificence of the venue, this is not a conference; it is, at heart, a family reunion. It is an opportunity that comes only once a year for all of us to come together, renew ties, share ideas, and learn of new developments in the field of reproductive health commodity security. And for those of you who are new to the Coalition, it is an opportunity for us to welcome you to the family; to familiarize you with our work; and to encourage you to engage actively with us.

But despite the familial feel, this meeting in Delhi is unique in a number of respects: For one thing, it is our first in Asia – a continent that has not been as engaged as others in our work – but where we hope the legacy of this meeting will live through the arrival of new regional partners, greater opportunities for cooperation, and new input into the work of our new initiatives and implementing mechanisms.

And finally, this meeting is distinct because it marks two important thresholds. First, it brings to a close the first decade of our existence as a global network. In April 2004, 26 representatives (6 of whom are present in this room today) met in a small office of the World Bank – and in so doing gave birth to the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition. Next year as we celebrate our tenth anniversary in Mexico City, we will do so with a new strategic plan to guide our work; a fully staffed global Secretariat of talented, energized professionals; and our new ambitious agenda and already changing peoples' lives for the better.

But there is another threshold we cross with this meeting – and that is one of leadership. I've been known remark on quite a few occasions that every Chair of the Coalition has been as different as day and night – but that each and every one has brought to the position skills and abilities that met the spirit and needs of the time.

Tomorrow, we will meet and welcome Dr. Marleen Temmerman, who will help steer the Coalition through the lively waters of the next few years. But today, at this particular closing moment of my address, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the unique and inimitable leadership of Julia Bunting. Julia has not just been the Coalition's constant champion; she is an ever-optimistic visionary, often dealing us a much-needed shot in the arm when the going has



been tough. Her keen mind and swift, sure decisions have stood us in good stead in tricky times.

As modest as Julia is, she is not going to thank me for slipping in the fact that this year, she was honored by Queen Elizabeth with an Order of the British Empire for her contribution to reproductive health. Please join me now in not just congratulating Julia for this honour, but also in thanking her from the bottom of our hearts for her tireless work for the Coalition and its members. Julia, as you step down as Chair tomorrow, I hope you will look back at these past four years with tremendous pride at having led us to where we are today.

No gift could ever compensate for the time, energy and guidance you have gifted us – but as a token of our collective appreciation I am honored, on behalf of the entire Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, to present to you with this.