

2019 – State of the Coalition

Good morning friends, colleagues and Coalition members.

What a pleasure it is to welcome you this morning to the top of the world.

And what better a place to be -- to take stock of this year's achievements, and even more importantly to look to the future; to begin making sense of the many changes that will shape our work in the years and decade to come.

There is a certain satisfaction in being at the top of the world at this particular moment in time – and that's because in one month and two days, we celebrate the 15th anniversary of the founding of the RHSC

On April 27, 2004, the Coalition, then comprising a total of 27 individuals, met for the first time at the offices of the World Bank in Washington, DC. Their aim, quoting from the notes of the event, was "... to be a regular forum for key players to share organizational priorities and develop joint strategies to move toward full supply of reproductive health (RH) commodities in developing countries." Clearly we owe those 27 visionaries a huge debt of gratitude for having planted the seeds—at a time of ideological discord, not unlike today—for what would eventually become the largest voluntary network of RH organizations in the world. And I would like to acknowledge two of those visionaries who are with us today, Jagdish Upadhyay and Alan Bornbusch.

As we have seen and will continue to see over the course of the next two days, this past year has been nothing short of remarkable. It's allowed us to embark on new areas of inquiry; build on themes begun in the past and forge new connections amongst our members.

There is nothing I would love to do more this morning than to describe in minute detail each of these ventures. Unfortunately, doing so in 15 would be even more remarkable – and so I would like to focus my comments not so much on what this year's work has **comprised**, but rather on what that work **means**—for us as a global network, for the wider RH community, and especially for the millions of people who stand to benefit from our work.

Four years ago, we launched our Strategic Plan—the conceptual framework, if you will, for all we do. It defines the content of our work—our strategic pillars of availability, choice, equity and quality. But it also encompasses the attributes by which we deliver results—our levers of change. Six levers to be exact: our neutrality, our convening power; our flexibility; our ability to broker relationships, our good name, and last, our brain trust. It is by leveraging these levers that we deliver results on each of our four strategic pillars.

This morning I would like to use these levers—at least four of them—to frame my remarks. And I've done so because I think these levers in particular allow me to convey in ways that sheer description cannot, what it is that's unique about the Coalition, and has also allowed us to grow and indeed thrive over the past decade and a half.

As a global network, we play a critical role as a convener. It is this lever of change that allows us to bring together people to do things no one individual or organization could achieve on their own.

As I think back on the past year, there are many examples I could point to reflect our convening power, but few would outshine the example of the Global FP VAN—a collaborative, shared platform to capture and use supply chain data from multiple sources and organizations to provide enhanced visibility for decision making.

Throughout our history, we in the RHSC have been at the center of efforts within the RH community to achieve supply chain visibility, and in particular to track and monitor the flow of products from the manufacturer to the user. The early pioneering work that led to the RH Interchange and the CARhs; the development of the PPMR in 2009 and then the Coordinated Supply Planning Group, or CSP, a few years later—all took place under the auspices of the Coalition.

But for some years now, we have come to realize that some things have just not been quite right. Different data sources were not comparable. And increasingly, we found ourselves struggling to make the most efficient use of these disparate tools. Some of them relied on dated technology, others were simply relics of a pre-digital age, and none of them shared common standards for data.

Over the past few years, partners have, at times, sought to remedy the problem. And they've done so by doing what comes almost intuitively in this metrics- and computer-focused world – they tried a technology fix. But what they failed to realize was that the obstacles we encountered were not just a technology problem— they were a people problem, a policy problem and a program problem. Because behind every single product that enters and hopefully leaves the supply chain are the people who make them, the systems that convey them, and the policies that govern what each player does.

To run efficiently, therefore, the Global FP VAN rests on a collective vision amongst those involved in it—from country stakeholders to procurers to manufacturers. Whether it involves standardizing data labels, to establishing the ground rules for data sharing; to ensuring a sustainable financing base, we need to think as one, we need to trust one another; and we need to focus on what binds us together. In many ways, the VAN is the manifestation of what it means to leave our institutional hats at the door.

In the last few months, we have seen our hard work come to fruition. We have proven that the concept of a shared platform is viable; we are making data available to a wider audience while at the same time seeing greater convergence on the rules governing data use; and we are increasingly seeing partners accept the VAN as “the single source of truth” it was intended to be, by letting go of data agreements they once held proprietary. And perhaps most notable of all, a month or so ago we saw two of our core partners—USAID and UNFPA—augment their already significant in-kind contributions to the VAN by investing an additional \$1.2 million dollars to ensure its scale-up over the coming year. And in doing so, they join the ranks of the Gates Foundation and DFID who invested the seed money that allowed the VAN to get on its feet.

I am so proud of the work my colleagues in the RHSC have played in forging this new venture – a truly global good that promises to transform our visibility into product flows, both globally and eventually at country level.

But the Global VAN isn’t the only example of what can be achieved by drawing on the knowledge and insights of our membership as a whole. Later this morning, we will be learning about an initiative that many of you know as the 2030 Ecosystem. In a nutshell, the initiative is nothing more, nothing less than a community-wide effort to define and reach consensus around what will be required to address the supply challenges of the coming decade. The effort stands out amongst so many of the visioning efforts now underway in that it’s not about discovering new or more effective ways to address old problems. It’s about agreeing on what will be different in the decade to come; picking the brains of those with unique insights into tomorrow’s realities; and finally, building consensus around the actions required to ensure broader access to RH supplies. Like the Global FP VAN, the Ecosystem discussions are not just a fact-finding exercise. They are about inspiring our community to act in new ways. They are about forging partnerships amongst groups that may never have partnered before. And they are about looking for answers in new places.

Again, this Ecosystem effort could not possibly be a success if it were simply a technical exercise – and that is why today and tomorrow we will be turning to all of you in this room to enrich the findings with your own experience and insight.

The Ecosystem work also provides me with a good Segway to another lever of change within the Coalition – and that is the flexibility that comes from having on the one hand, a central workplan and agenda, financed collectively by our core donors; and on the other, earmarked funds tied to specific activities in line with the objectives of the core agenda. This core support has provided us with the flexibility to respond rapidly to critical issues as they arise. Many of you will recall our 2015 engagement in the launch of the Global Financing Facility or GFF, as it is

widely known today. It was an engagement called for by participants at our 2015 General Membership Meeting in Mexico – but one that enabled us to raise the profile of family planning within the GFF and eventually ensure civil society participation in the development of GFF country plans.

In many ways, our involvement in the Ecosystem discussions showcases the value and utility of our flexible funding base. It emerged out of conversations last year with DFID and other key donors. And now, eight months later, we are here to present preliminary findings.

Our flexibility has also been manifest in our work in Latin America where, since 2017, we have been working to open the eyes of national procurers to the supply opportunities around them. Through a series of face to face meetings called *encuentros*, we are helping regional players to take advantage of those opportunities for which they are eligible; and to apply the lessons of the last decade to benefit themselves and the region. Last year, participants at the *encuentros* called upon us to help them improve market intelligence as a means of upping their negotiating position with manufacturers. Within months of that request, we had begun supporting the developing of a business intelligence tool called SEPREMI that will allow countries across the region to upload all their pricing data on a range of supplies. When the platform is up and running, hopefully this summer, countries will have comparative price information that they can use when negotiating tenders with manufacturers.

Many of the examples I've mentioned also call on another of the Coalition's levers of change – our reliable and wide-ranging brain trust. As a global network of nearly 500 member organizations, we bring together the best and the brightest in the RH field. This brain trust houses our intellectual capital, it incubates new ideas, and solves supplies-related issues. Many of you will recall our last membership meeting, where colleagues from BelieveGreen sought our help in figuring out how to certify the reduction in carbon emissions that will result from family planning programs. In the months since Brussels, that conversation evolved into a workstream within the MDA Working Group – and today BelieveGreen has applied much of what they learned from those discussions in the formulation of its proposal to certifying bodies.

This year we also saw our brain trust hard at work in the development of the 2019 Commodity Gap Analysis. And we see a host of new features within it – the extension of the timeline from 2020 to 2030; the introduction of new data sources from Coalition partners such as PMA2020, FP Watch, Track20, MSI, PSI, and DKT. And for the first time, it presents a more in-depth look at the “private sector” by teasing out the multifaceted role of the social-marketing sector, which straddles both public and private.

But our brain trust also manifests itself in the creative energy that leads to new initiatives and new ways of thinking. One of the most striking examples of this has been our work in the area

of menstrual health. This year alone, we saw the launch of no fewer than four activities on this issue. We launched a new workstream dedicated to MH within the NURHT Caucus. We provided Innovation Fund support to help socially market the menstrual cup in Uganda with a view towards cross subsidizing the product for the poor. We supported the Menstrual Hygiene Day campaign by rallying voices from across RH community And in December, we awarded Wash United – our 462nd member—an Innovation Fund award to document strategies for implementing the #DropTheTax campaign for menstrual supplies at country level.

There is a fourth lever of change – one on which I would like to end this discussion – and that has been central to the work of the coalition, from the very outset. That lever is our neutrality and our ability to offer members a safe space for candid honest, discussion. It is that safe space that has allowed the partners in our *encuentros* to speak openly amongst themselves. It is that space that made possible the early reductions in the price of contraceptive implants. And it is that space that has allowed key stakeholders in the Global VAN to share data and those outside the VAN to ask to be heard.

But that neutrality is always a fragile commodity – and can easily be shattered when confidences are broken, when opinions given in good faith are not treated as such; and when the dignity of all members are not respected. Last year, in my State of the Coalition speech, I reiterated the importance we attach to taking seriously the integrity of all our members and our refusal to brook abuse of any kind taking place at events under our auspices. Indeed, this year when you registered to participate in this conference, you signed a statement agreeing to ensure an environment free from harassment.

Over the course of the past year, my colleagues within the Coalition Secretariat have worked tirelessly with our Executive Committee to forge a Discrimination and Harassment Policy that prohibits all forms of harassment and sexual misconduct among representatives of RHSC member organizations in connection with their RHSC work. And I am happy to announcement that yesterday, our Executive Committee officially approved our Discrimination and Harassment Policy Statement, which will now be incorporated into our Terms of Reference and posted on our website. This is a truly auspicious 15th birthday present and one that will ensure that the safe space so critical to our own success remains safe for the foreseeable future.

As I've noted on many occasions before, we were born 15 years ago in a period of ideological discord. The fact we have survived both that period and the good years that followed is a testament to the success of creating safe spaces, of leaving institutional hats at the door, of convening partners, of tapping the brain trust inherent in our members, and of focusing on what binds us, not divides us. So, we leave 2018 with our eyes firmly fixed on the decade

ahead. We have always been a Coalition of the willing and a partnership based on trust, mutual respect and a shared vision. Over the next two days, as we teach, learn, strategize and plan, let's also recommit to building a new future together.