

Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition Update

March 2006

RHSC Spring 2006 Meeting

UNFPA will host the next RHSC meeting 27–28 April at UNFPA's New York Headquarters. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA, will join us for part of the meeting. Formal invitations with relevant logistics information will go out 1 March.

Market Development Approaches (MDA) Working Group

Leader : Ben Light

The MDA working group and its subgroup on generics had constructive, collaborative meetings on 25, 26, and 27 January hosted by IPPF in London. More than 20 people participated. The MDA is making progress and moving toward agreement on a concrete work plan to achieve its objectives.

The presentations and discussion at the January meeting included:

- IPPF's second tier market research.
- A typology for identifying countries in which a market development approach has the greatest likelihood of success.
- Overview of market approaches and lessons learned, commissioned by the working group.
- Progress on WHO prequalification for reproductive health medicines, and WHO's draft list of priority medicines for prequalification, to be presented at the upcoming meeting.
- Relationship of the MDA working group with other working groups, specifically, linkages and complementary areas of interest /work.
- Effective reporting and communication to the RHSC.

The group further developed its workplan focusing on 2006 activities. Access information about the typology and the overview of market approaches mentioned above and ICON findings can be shared at the April meeting.

The Supply Systems Working Group (SSWG)

Leader: Alan Bornbusch

The SSWG had a fruitful meeting on 20 January in New York, hosted by UNPFA. The group reviewed their 2006–08 work plan, concentrating on 2006 activities. Lead individuals gave progress reports and the group advised on next steps for each activity. Discussion points included:

- Clarification of the SSWG's role vis-à-vis strengthening country LMIS.
- Building country capacity for procurement as an emergent priority; identification of some priority actions in this area.
- Continued development of metrics for the CAR group and indicators for SSWG objectives.
- Financing as a cross-cutting issue. The SSWG has "commissioned" two studies, funded by the Gates Foundation and KfW, to develop design options for alternative mechanisms that will make more efficient use of resources to finance RH supplies and mobilize new resources. The RMA will identify representatives to join the advisory groups for these studies.

The Resource Mobilization and Awareness (RMA) Working Group

Chief Advocate: Terri Bartlett

Susan Rich (starting April 2006)

Upcoming RMA Meeting. The RMA working group postponed meeting until after the January meetings of the MDA and SSWG in order to better identify key advocacy issues. They will meet 19–20 March at the Supply Initiative office in Brussels, Belgium.

During the meeting the group plans to:

- Develop a recommendation for civil society representation to the RHSC.
- Respond to linkages to and requests from the other two working groups—for example, review of the results of the financing mechanisms research of the SSWG.

The Resource Mobilization and Awareness (RMA) Working Group

(continued)

- Discuss membership in and leadership of the RMA.
- Plan and update the activities in the RMA workplan.

Roundtable Meeting on Supplies In Brussels.

Margret Verwijk, Wolfgang Bichmann, and Lena Sund gave presentations at a Roundtable Meeting for EU MEPs (Members of European Parliament) and Embassy representatives of the ACP Alliance (Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific) on the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition and on the EC's supplies research. The Roundtable, the third such roundtable meeting in four years on the topic of supplies, was entitled "How Can the EU Address the Reproductive Health Supply Shortage?" and was organized by Marie Stopes International/Brussels. In addition to the incoming RHSC Co-Chairs, Ben Light also presented on UNFPA's Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Health Commodity Security 2006-2010 and Carolyn Vogel and Mercedes Mas de Xaxas of PAI/Supply Initiative also attended as respondents.

New Factsheet. "Why Reproductive Health Supplies are Crucial to Poverty Reduction." The Supply Initiative has finalized this fact sheet on Reproductive Health Supplies and PRSPs and other financing mechanisms. It reviews the presence of RH and RH supplies in PRSPs, and discusses supplies in the context of funding mechanisms such as SWAps, CSPs, general or sector budget support, PEPFAR, and the Global Fund. The printed version will be available soon and will be posted on the SI website at http://www.rhsupplies.org/resources_toolkit_fact.shtml.

U.S. Supplies Bill

On 8 February 2006, a contraceptives supplies bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill, "Ensuring Access to Contraceptives Act of 2006," exempts non-governmental family planning providers from the restrictions of the Global Gag Rule with respect to USAID-donated contraceptives and condoms. The same eligibility criteria for receiving USAID-funded reproductive health supplies that is currently applied to foreign governments would be applied to NGOs. The bill also authorises an additional US\$150 million annually for the 2006-07 fiscal year for USAID to provide a reliable and

sustainable supply of modern contraceptives and condoms in developing nations.

This funding level is double the current amount spend by USAID on contraceptives. U.S. Representative (Connecticut) Rob Simmons, lead Republican sponsor of the bill, said: "The shortage of contraceptive supplies in developing countries has contributed to the already high rate of unintended pregnancies, resulting abortions, maternal and infant mortality and the deadly spread of HIV/AIDS. All women deserve access to safe and effective family planning resources to make the decisions that are appropriate for them and their families. I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that these life-saving supplies are made available." PAI was instrumental in introducing this bill in the U.S. Congress.

RHSC Secretariat

In February, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation approved a three-year grant to support a Brussels-based RHSC Secretariat with a small staff of four (director, technical officer, program associate, and program assistant). The grant will serve to strengthen the RHSC Secretariat, which will continue to be housed at PATH, to better support to the Coalition in advancing its priorities.

One of the initial tasks under the new grant is recruitment of an RHSC Director. An RHSC Director Recruitment Task Force drawn primarily from the Executive Committee has been working with PATH to fill the position. The Task Force is composed of: Jacqui Darroch, Jagdish Upadhyay, Margret Verwijk, and Chris Elias (PATH President). In December PATH posted the position on 12 websites. In addition, the job description was sent to all RHSC members with a request to share it among their networks, and in January the position was advertised in *The Economist* and *The Guardian*. This resulted in more than 70 expressions of interest. The Task Force expects to have identified a candidate by April.

Let us Know!

The new Secretariat staff will be developing communication mechanisms for the RHSC. Your thoughts and feedback on topics that would be of interest for internal RHSC communication are welcome. Please send your ideas by email to mweldin@path.org.